

**The Origin of Arab Americans: from  
Immigration to Settlement (1880-2001)**  
**أصل العرب الأمريكيين: من الهجرة إلى الإستقرار (1880-2001)**

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**Abstract:** Arab Americans are Americans of both Arab ethnic or cultural and linguistic inheritance, who live in the USA and who 80% among them have their citizenship. Arab Americans ascertain their origin to the numerous waves of immigrants of around 22 countries composing the Arab World. There are nearly 3.5 million Arab Americans in the United States according to the Arab American Institute. Arab-Americans live in all 50 states and in Washington, D.C., and 94% reside in the metropolitan areas of major cities like California, Michigan and New York. Arab Christians represent 63% of the Arab population while Muslims represent almost 24% those who tie themselves to other religions represent 13% of the Arab community. Arab Americans are categorised as being white in addition there are seen as being a successful community 61% of Arab Americans are highly educated people especially in science and medicine. Moreover the median wage for Arab American worker per year excess 54,000 \$ which is far beyond the wage of average American family which is about 43,000\$. The majority of Arab Americans around 62% originate from the region of the Levant, which involves Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, with an overwhelming majority from Lebanon. The rest of Arab Americans are made up of those from Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Libya, the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arab nations. The intent of this article is to study the origins of Arab Americans. The paper examines the history of the Arab American community in the United States and the origin of its settlement in the American soil, from the first wave in early 1880s to nowadays. A large percentage of those who left their motherland were pushed by political and economic circumstances. The decision to leave their motherland, families, and relatives to abandon their nationality is an act of will which could be analysed by a historical background and to tackle with the Arab pioneers who departed in order to boost their fortune. The research provides an overview of Arabs immigration, settlement, assimilation and adaptation and discusses the reasons that pushed them to move to the United States.

**Key words:** Arab Americans, Immigration, Settlement, Assimilation, Adaptation , Arab Identity.

ملخص: العرب الأمريكيون هم العرب المقيمين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، ومنهم 80% حاصلين على الجنسية الأمريكية. ينحدر العرب الأمريكيون غالبا من البلاد العربية، والتي تتكون من 22 دولة بدءا من عمان في أقصى الجنوب الشرقي للعالم العربي حتى موريتانيا في أقصى غرب أفريقيا، ويعود أصل عرب أمريكا إلى العديد من الهجرات من البلدان العربية. هناك تقريبا 3,5 مليون عربي في أمريكا تبعا لإحصاءات المعهد العربي الأمريكي. يعيش العرب الأمريكيين موزعين في مختلف المدن الأمريكية الخمسين زيادة على مدينة واشنطن، ويعيش 94% منهم في المدن الكبرى. وينحدر 62% من العرب الأمريكيين من بلاد الشام (سوريا ولبنان وفلسطين والأردن)، ويمثل العرب الأمريكيون من أصل مصري 11%، ويشكل بقية العرب (العراق واليمن ودول المغرب العربي والدول العربية الأخرى) النسبة الباقية من العرب الأمريكيين وهي 27%. وتوجد أكبر التجمعات العربية في أمريكا في ولايات كاليفورنيا وميشيغان ونيويورك. ويمثل العرب المسيحيين ما نسبته 63% بينما يكون المسلمون 24% من العرب الأمريكيين، ويشكل أتباع الأديان الأخرى حوالي 13%. يصنف العرب الأمريكيين على أنهم عرق أبيض من طرف الحكومة ودائرة الإحصاء الأمريكية. وتعتبر الجالية العربية في الولايات المتحدة جالية ناجحة؛ فحوالي 61% منهم حملة شهادات علمية عليا، ولديهم نسبة عالية في المهن الحرة والطبية والهندسة، كما أن متوسط دخل الأسر الأمريكية من أصل عربي في عموم الولايات المتحدة يتجاوز 54 ألف دولار سنويا متفوقا بذلك على مستوى دخل الأسر الأمريكية الأخرى، والبالغ 43.6 ألف دولار سنويا.

يدرس هذا المقال تاريخ هجرة العرب إلى الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، والأسباب التي دفعتهم إلى الهجرة والاستقرار في أمريكا من الدفعة الأولى في أوائل 1880 إلى يومنا هذا. مع العلم أن النسبة الكبيرة من الذين هاجروا وطنهم الأصلي قاموا بذلك لأسباب سياسية واقتصادية. لماذا اتخذ العرب قرار الهجرة من وطنهم والتخلي عن عائلاتهم وجنسياتهم؟ ذلك هو السؤال الذي سيكون محور هذا المقال، كما سنتطرق فيه أيضا إلى هجرة العرب واستقرارهم، واستيعاب والتكيف مع الحضارة الأمريكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العرب الأمريكيون، الهجرة العربية، الولايات المتحدة، التكيف الهجري، الأسر الأمريكية، الجنسية الأمريكية.

**Introduction:** Since the very beginning America was a refuge for those who fled religious and political oppression or who sought for economic opportunities. This was the case not only for Europeans but also for any ambitious person who braved the high seas to seek his or her fortune on the American soil. Some were luckier than others and were able to reach the American soil but others died within few months after their arrival in the United States. These men and women wanted a new departure regardless of their religion or origin. Though, these immigrants arrived

freely, they had nevertheless to pay the full price: in fact they had to put up with hard conditions, bad weather, diseases and the harsh environment found in the colonies.

In a discourse given in 1859, Abraham Lincoln declared: “*Our ancestors among us, perhaps half our people, who are not descendants at all of these men; they are men who have come from Europe German, Irish, French, and Scandinavian men that have come from Europe themselves... to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh, of the men who wrote that Declaration (speaking about the declaration of independence)*”<sup>1</sup>.

What Lincoln attempted to do was to sum up the real essence of the American dream; the promise that all immigrants have a chance to achieve material wealth and success through their own effort, hard work and self discipline.

In many aspects, motivations for Arabs to move to America were the same for most immigrants. Arabs brought with them their culture, language, traditions and social institutions. Overtime they adapted themselves to their new country and became an integral part of the American society. Before dealing with the Arab American community, one has to define what is to be an Arab. People tend to think that the term Arab goes back to the people coming from Arabic speaking countries of the Middle East, however, the term is very controversial. Generally, it refers to a person whose mother tongue is Arabic; but is the fact of speaking Arabic sufficient to classify you as Arab? Most of the time, the term Arab is related to the Islamic faith, yet not all Arabs are not Muslims. Moreover this theory is not relevant because there are also some non Arab communities like the Kurds, the Chluh, The Circassians<sup>2</sup> Armenians and Berbers who do speak Arabic. Despite all these conditions the majority of Arab Americans consider themselves Arabs because they are descendents of people from the Middle East and North African countries. The Arabic language is the language of the holy book of Islam which is the Quran. The whole majority of indigenous people of these regions embraced Islam, and adopted the Arabic language which created strong ties between them. Today 1,400 years later the Islamic holy book remains in its original Arabic text, thus this language is used and celebrated by millions of Muslims all over the world.

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1- A speech Abraham Lincoln gave in 1858 at the height of anti-immigrant power within his party (available from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/04/25/lindsay>).

2- The Circassians are an indigenous people of the Northwest Caucasus region.

Arabs also trace their ancestry to the golden ages of the Abbasids<sup>1</sup>. With the extension of Islam and the conquest of Syria in the seventh century, the Arab population discontinued to be predominantly Christian and became Muslim at large. Nevertheless, by the thirteenth century, the Arab empire declined significantly and witnessed the rise of the Ottomans. The Ottomans conquered lots of Arabic lands and ruled them for centuries. One of the characteristics that caused the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire was the Millet<sup>2</sup> System. This latter acknowledged the existence of non Muslim religions and faiths. As long as these religious groups paid their taxes, they were allowed to pursue their own laws, customs and faiths. The Ottoman Empire was among the most predominant civilisations for several centuries from 1500 until 1923 the period that marked the dissolution of the empire and its division.

What makes the Arab Americans feel Arabs is their cultural and historical heritage, and the collective experience they have had on the American soil. But one must not forget the huge variance within the Arab community, and the necessity for the Arab people to be distinguished as such.

## **I. Coming to America:**

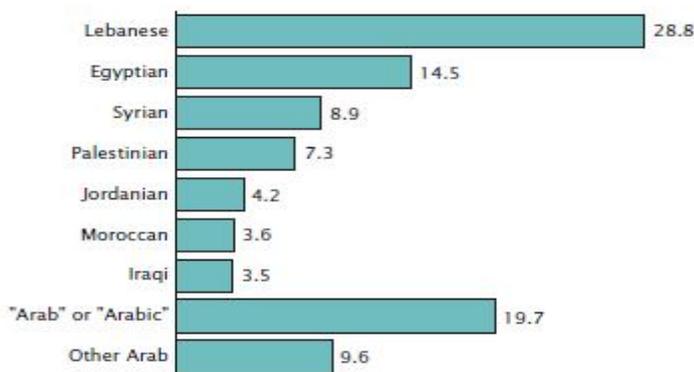
**I.1. Early Arab Immigrants from 1880 to 1915:** The apparent push factors that incited the shifting of the Arabs to America thoroughly altered their development into the American society. The first Arabs to set foot on the American soil were village farmers or artisans who set out in order to gain wealth, in search of adventure, to improve themselves economically or simply to avoid military service. Fewer Muslims came at that time and many immigrated in North and South America and the majority settled in New England. For financial reasons and due to poverty of under developed countries like the Middle East, they immigrated in small numbers looking for better jobs and better opportunities, thus improving their living standards exactly as other groups of immigrants that settled in America at that time. Moreover, Arabs actively participated to the development of the American society in various fields, and they were recruited in America because of the mounting labour shortage.

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1- The Abbasids or the Abbasid caliphate was the third of the Islamic caliphates. It was ruled by the Abbasid dynasty of caliphs, who built their capital in Baghdad after overthrowing the Umayyad caliphs from all but the Al Andalus region. It was founded by the descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad's youngest uncle, Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, in Harran in 750 CE and shifted its capital in 762 to Baghdad.

2- Millet is a term for a minority religious community within a larger state of a different religion. Most commonly used to refer to communities within the Islamic Ottoman Empire.

The Arab immigration to the new world started nearly two centuries ago around 1800. It traces its origins to several Arab countries. They arrived to the United States in two significant and different migration waves, each with its proper characteristics that were useful in the formation of political movements of Arab Americans. No economic or political events triggered the immigration of Arabs in the United States, and few reached the American soil before the 1880s. The first wave to set foot on the new world came during the era called the great migration when more than 20 million of immigrants came to the United States from all over the world. Between the late 1800 and World War I, lots of Arabs moved to America mainly from Great Syria which includes present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. At that period a few number of Arabs came from Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt and many other regions from the Ottoman Empire. These provinces were divided into several independent countries as Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Iraq. (Figure 1 : Arab Population by Ancestry 2000)



Note: Other Arab (9.6 percent) includes Yemeni, Kurdish, Algerian, Saudi, Tunisian, Kuwaiti, Libyan, Berber, Emirati (United Arab Emirates), Omani, Qatari, Bahraini, Alhuceman, Bedouin, Rio de Oro, and the general terms Middle Eastern and North African.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

Source: U.S. Census 2000([www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf))

The majority of Arabs who came at that time was Christian, and belonged to a lower middle class. They fled their homelands devastated by civil wars and persecutions, looking for new opportunities. These immigrants left their original countries which were under feudal system<sup>1</sup> until a civil war broke up in 1860 between Christians Syrians and Muslim Palestinians<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, people rapidly lost their lands and

1- Feudalism is a decentralized socio-political structure in which a weak monarchy attempts to control the lands of the realm through reciprocal agreements with regional leaders.

2- The Druze and their Christian Maronite neighbours, who had thus far lived as religious communities on friendly terms, entered a period of social disturbance in the year 1840, which

started to look for a refuge because of the Ottoman oppression which did not grant the same rights to Christians and Muslims who had fewer restrictions.

In addition the inauguration of the Suez Canal which regulated the traffic between the Mediterranean countries and the Far East made the transport of merchandise so easier and faster that Japanese silk dethroned Lebanon silk. As a result most Arabs made living through pack peddling of dry goods, however many, subsequently, became manufacturers, storekeepers, and importers. Arabs continued working under this rhythm until the immigration laws restricted the entry of a number of nationalities from the Middle East, including Arabs. After the civil war, immigration took up again to stream to the United States. Nearly 12 million immigrants came to America between 1870 and 1900 including approximately 60 000 Arabs, of whom 68 per cent were single males and more than a half were illiterate. For these people the United States represented the American dream; an opportunity to seize in order to have a better life. It is important to state that extensive federal legislations on immigration were not deeply promulgated at that time, mainly because immigration was needed and required for its labour force to achieve a developed nation.

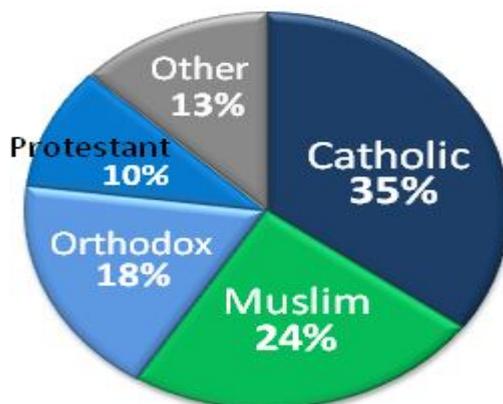
**I.2. The Second Wave of Arab Immigrants from 1930s to 1970s:** Arab immigration to the United States was impeded by the establishment of a number of laws that restricted the flow of migration, such as The Immigration Act of 1924 also known as “Johnson-Reed Act” including the National Origins Act, and the Asian Exclusion Act<sup>1</sup>. The act was a United States federal law that limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States. The purpose of the law was to restrict further immigration from the Southern and Eastern Europeans who had intent to come to the United States in large numbers during the 1890s, and aimed also to prohibit the immigration of Asians. After the end of the Second World War, and despite the huge effort of the American government to restrict the flow of immigrants through immigration quota act, Arab immigration started again around 1940 to the 1960s. Compared to the first wave, which was composed mainly of 90% of Christians and only 5% of Muslims, the new Arab immigrants’

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culminated in the civil war of 1860. The civil war of 1860 cost the Christians some ten thousand lives in lots of towns of Lebanon.

1- Lemay, Michael Robert; Barkan, Elliott Robert, eds (1999). U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Laws and Issues: A Documentary History. Greenwood Press.p148

nationalities, origins and faith were diverse<sup>1</sup>.( **Figure 2: Religious Affiliation of Arab Americans 2000**)



Source: Arab\_American\_religions.png

Indeed the second wave included 60% of Muslims coming from Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Arabs tended to transcend their religious differences as their membership comprised people from all faith communities such as Sunni, Shia, Druze, Orthodox, Melkite, Protestant and catholic. Moreover, unlike the first wave the second influx tended to stay in the United States in search of better living conditions, to escape oppression, military service and wars. Furthermore the Arab Israeli conflict has always provoked the departure of great waves of population. Clashes from 1948 to 1967 where Arabs were defeated pushed many Palestinians to flee from their motherlands.

In addition, new immigrants were well off compared to the first immigrants. Indeed the majority of them were middle class professionals who were highly educated and highly skilled including; professors, teachers, doctors and engineers. Moreover among the second wave there were a considerable number of students, who were attracted by the American universities that favoured Brain Drain<sup>2</sup>. The majority of these immigrants considered themselves as being sojourners and their motivation was to return home once life in their countries became safer. However these students chose to stay in the United States even after the end of their scholarship.

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1- Robert K. Murray, *The 103rd Ballot: Democrats and the Disaster in Madison Square Garden*(Harper & Row, 1976)

2- Brain drain refers particularly to the emigration of scientists and highly qualified people to the United States in the early 1960s for more favourable geographic, economic, or professional environments.

**I.3. The Last Wave of Arab Immigrants from 1965 to 2001:** With the changes in laws, Arab immigration entered a new chapter in its history. Approximately 75 % of foreign born Arab Americans immigrated after 1975 and 1980<sup>1</sup>. This last rush is the result of the Immigration Act<sup>2</sup> of 1965 which abolished the original quota system which was made in place in 1924 and its bias against non European immigration<sup>3</sup>. It comprised professionals and entrepreneurs who escaped their homelands which were devastated by wars, political and economic instability. The last wave which was more diverse in terms of religion tended to make a huge effort in order to keep its identity, culture and traditions. These new comers, Christians or Muslims strongly defended Arab nationalism and kept a close contact with their motherland.

The term Arab Americans refers to people coming to the United States from the Middle East and the Maghreb. Most Arab Americans of the first influx came from Great Syria, mainly from what is called today Lebanon and where the majority of the population is Christian. It was the late wave that included the most diverse minority of Arabs, especially from Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine and it included a huge number of Muslims. In 2000 there were 1.2 million persons of Arab ancestry in the United States compared with 610.000 in 1980 and 860.000 in 1900. Arabs represented 0,42 percent of the U.S. population in 2000, compared with 0,27 in 1980. More than 37 per cent among those reported to be Arabs were Lebanese, the second largest group were Syrians, other nationalities; Egyptians, Palestinians, Jordanians, Moroccans, and Iraqis were also palpable. Moreover nearly 4,3 per cent of Arab population was identified as Kurdish, Algerian, Yemenite, Saudi Arabian, Tunisian, Berber, Libyan and Kuwaiti. ( **Table 1: Arab population by ancestry** )

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1- [http://www.adcnj.us/Arab\\_Americans/arab\\_americans\\_demographics.htm](http://www.adcnj.us/Arab_Americans/arab_americans_demographics.htm)

2- There were a series of laws passed in 1965, during the Civil Rights Movement. These laws have abolished quotas based on nationality, in force since, The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.

3- [http://www.adcnj.us/Arab\\_Americans/arab\\_americans\\_demographics.htm](http://www.adcnj.us/Arab_Americans/arab_americans_demographics.htm).

| Subject                                               | 1990        |         | 2000        |         | Change, 1990 to 2000 |         |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
|                                                       | Number      | Percent | Number      | Percent | Number               | Percent |
| Total population .....                                | 248,709,873 | 100.00  | 281,421,906 | 100.00  | 32,712,033           | 13.2    |
| <b>TOTAL ARAB POPULATION AND ANCESTRY<sup>1</sup></b> |             |         |             |         |                      |         |
| Total Arab population .....                           | 860,354     | 0.35    | 1,189,731   | 0.42    | 329,377              | 38.3    |
| Lebanese .....                                        | 394,180     | 45.82   | 440,279     | 37.01   | 46,099               | 11.7    |
| Syrian .....                                          | 129,606     | 15.06   | 142,897     | 12.01   | 13,291               | 10.3    |
| Egyptian .....                                        | 78,574      | 9.13    | 142,832     | 12.01   | 64,258               | 81.8    |
| All other Arab reports .....                          | 268,378     | 31.19   | 476,863     | 40.08   | 208,485              | 77.7    |
| Specific Arab ancestry .....                          | 132,066     | 15.35   | 239,424     | 20.12   | 107,358              | 81.3    |
| Palestinian .....                                     | 48,019      | 5.58    | 72,112      | 6.06    | 24,093               | 50.2    |
| Jordanian .....                                       | 20,656      | 2.40    | 39,734      | 3.34    | 19,078               | 92.4    |
| Moroccan .....                                        | 19,089      | 2.22    | 38,923      | 3.27    | 19,834               | 103.9   |
| Iraqi .....                                           | 23,212      | 2.70    | 37,714      | 3.17    | 14,502               | 62.5    |
| Yemeni .....                                          | 4,093       | 0.48    | 11,683      | 0.98    | 7,590                | 185.4   |
| Kurdish .....                                         | 2,181       | 0.25    | 9,423       | 0.79    | 7,242                | 332.0   |
| Algerian .....                                        | 3,215       | 0.37    | 8,752       | 0.74    | 5,537                | 172.2   |
| Saudi Arabian .....                                   | 4,486       | 0.52    | 7,419       | 0.62    | 2,933                | 65.4    |
| Tunisian .....                                        | 2,376       | 0.28    | 4,735       | 0.40    | 2,359                | 99.3    |
| Kuwaiti .....                                         | 1,306       | 0.15    | 3,162       | 0.27    | 1,856                | 142.1   |
| Libyan .....                                          | 2,172       | 0.25    | 2,979       | 0.25    | 807                  | 37.2    |
| Berber .....                                          | 530         | 0.06    | 1,327       | 0.11    | 797                  | 150.4   |
| Other specific Arab ancestry <sup>2</sup> .....       | 731         | 0.08    | 1,461       | 0.12    | 730                  | 99.9    |
| General Arab ancestry .....                           | 136,312     | 15.84   | 237,439     | 19.96   | 101,127              | 74.2    |
| Arab or Arabic .....                                  | 127,364     | 14.80   | 205,822     | 17.30   | 78,458               | 61.6    |
| Middle Eastern .....                                  | 7,656       | 0.89    | 28,400      | 2.39    | 20,744               | 271.0   |
| North African .....                                   | 1,292       | 0.15    | 3,217       | 0.27    | 1,925                | 149.0   |

Source: U.S. Census 2000([www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf))

**II- Early Adaptation to the New Homeland:** As it is the case of many cultures, the more a minority's culture is different from the host country, the less it is accepted. Even if the early settlers were quite accepted those who had a flagrant and pointed differences like the Arabs, Asian, Indians and many others posed a threat to the traditional American values and thus, tended to be rejected. By 1910s millions of immigrants came to the United States, these massive numbers of settlers spurred competing social and civic ideologies on how the American government should tackle with such evolvments. Therefore it was common to refer to the new immigrant groups by their race, in spite of their common European origin. Sustained by restrictions that appeared in early 1890s, those immigration amendments in the early 1920s aimed by all means to reconstitute the original balance of a European array which characterized the pre 1890 migration. Therefore the 1924 National Origins Act seriously challenged the immigrants towards the United States. The major acts that prohibited the immigration of Asians towards the United States tried to cut back the number of new settlers and give advantageous quotas to the earliest settler groups from northern Europe.

The constancy of the quota system and its supremacy over the classification of the new immigrants on the basis of race and ethnicity remained until the immigration Act of 1965.

**II.1 Adaptation of the First Wave of Arab Immigrants:** The first wave of Arab immigrants to the United States came for economic reasons. They came temporarily to provide for their relatives, and they served under the peonage system, while lots of Arabs worked as peddlers, others worked in the new factories or mills. Mainly Christians (about 90%), adapted themselves rapidly to the American society. The early Arab immigrant considered themselves as being sojourners so they learned vague notion of English, enough to peddle their goods. These newcomers practiced peddling because this activity demanded little use of English language. In 1862, an increasing number of Arabs came to America attracted by the Homestead Act which gave a land to anyone who was ready to farm it in order to promote Westward expansion. Although they came temporarily to accumulate money and then return home, the majority of them ended up in bringing over their families and becoming permanent residents.

Many Arab immigrants among the first settlers came to America by boats entering the port of New York City. By the 1920s America was in a short supply of labour force, and a great number of Arabs were attracted by industries payment of that time. They settled in urban areas such as Detroit, Michigan and Ohio and found jobs in the industrial factories like Ford and textile mills which evolved the U.S. industry. Indeed at that time Ford factory offered five dollars per day to those who could support the appalling conditions. In addition the majority of these immigrants was illiterate and thus considered their wages as being favourable ones. Moreover Arabs at their arrival practiced the peddling trade which consisted in selling goods door to door and which was lucrative. By 1924, there were about 200.000 Arabs living in the United States. This population was essentially composed of less educated Maronites Christians who came from a rural environment.

Many Arabs at that time came to work for a short period of time and went back home with whatever money they had set aside from their hard labour. Nevertheless, with time, the idea of returning home fizzled out and they started thinking to settle in America. Even though they faced some difficulties at their arrival, they adapted themselves quite rapidly to the American norms and values, like many other immigrant groups. It is important to mention that the first comers were not very politicised, due to their modest milieu, and because of the lack of any democratic notion in their mother countries.

**II.2 The Adaptation of the Second Wave of Arab Immigrants:** By 1910, peddling activity decreased as a business and was substituted by

the proliferation of stores and little shops. The second wave included immigrants of both Christian and Muslim faith. Arabs of this influx were more secular, better educated, politically sophisticated and more acquainted with democratic norms. Immigrants at that time were usually refugees from the numerous conflicts in the Middle East, and more resolute to become Americans. Moreover Arab American immigrants entered a new era which was the phase of assimilation and adaptation process. In addition this wave accentuates its communal identity, and long after their settlement they were bewildered between the inabilities of the American legal system to decide whether they classify them as white or non-white people.

Moreover, during the inter-war period immigrants were not welcomed due to the economic crisis (Great Depression), thus few Arabs came to the United States. This historical period ended with the appearance of some restrictive laws. Indeed the American society rejected the coming of Germans and Irish Catholics, who came in masses during the period of 1820s and 1860s, though lot of movements emerged after the Civil War in opposition to this rush of immigrants. A Corollary of this was the issuing of Federal law to limit the immigration of some groups of people. As a result lots of legislations as the Emergency Quota Act of 1921<sup>1</sup>, and the Immigration Act of 1924<sup>2</sup> were passed to restrict the immigration movement. This broadening of legislative discrimination included Syrians and Lebanese, who, based on the location of their native land, were ostensibly classified as Asians.

**II.3 The Adaptation of the Last Wave of Immigrants:** Due to their diversity, the third wave of immigrants encountered a bad reception from their new guest. Hostility toward the people of the Middle East and especially Muslims had increased during the 1980s. An overview made in the 1981 summed up all the negative perception of the Americans toward the Arab Americans<sup>3</sup>. A majority of the interviewed answered the question concerning Arabs as being “barbaric and cruel” (44%),

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1- Also known as (the Johnson Quota Act) of May 19, 1921 was an immigration quota that limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 3% of the number of persons from that country living in the United States in 1910, according to United States Census figures.

2- Also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, including the National Origins Act, Asian Exclusion Act, was a United States federal law that limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, according to the Census of 1890.

3- Slade, Shelly. “The Image of the Arab in America: Analysis of a Poll on American Attitudes.” Middle East Journal (Spring 1981).

“treacherous, cunning” (49 %), “mistreat women” (51 %), “warlike” and “bloodthirsty” (50 %), to be “anti Christians” (40 %) or “anti Semitic” (40 %)<sup>1</sup>. These negative attitudes reached their peak with the 1973 oil crisis<sup>2</sup>, and the hostility towards Arabs lasted until the 1990s, the period that refers to the political turmoil in the Middle East.

Moreover unlike the other waves of immigration, the last influx which came during the 70s tended to be more attached to their own identity and culture. The last rush of immigrants expressed an increasing sentiment toward ethnic awareness which has developed even more recently, spurring recent generations to revive the Arabic cultural heritage; by learning the Arab language, making trips to their native countries, valorising their traditional dance and music. The main reason was due to their religion and cultural diversity. Whether the first wave was predominately constituted of Christians, the last wave was mainly constituted by Muslims as it was stated before.

Arabs settled in the American soil in the 1970s, they betted on the education of their children because they knew that it was the only way for them to guarantee the family welfare. Some graduated students who came to carry on their scholarship married American citizens and settled in the United States and others were refugees. These growing Arab communities created their own churches, mosques, restaurants, shops and institutions.

The arrival of the last wave coincided with number of changes in the American mind. The Civil Rights movement and the relaxation of immigration laws propagated new ideals which pushed all immigrants to enlighten their ethnic background. New Arabs tended to display an Arab patriotism, in contrast to the earlier waves which inclined to hide their Arab origins. With a better sense of identity, the last wave included highly skilled and highly educated individuals who escaped from their homelands devastated by civil wars. The multiculturalists’ spirit that emerged after the 1970s stimulated the politicization of the Arab Americans, making them more aware of their ethnic patterns.

**III- Reasons of their Departure to the New Homeland:** In the late nineteenth century America was in the eyes of the whole world a remote and mysterious reality. Nevertheless it was not enough to inhibit Arab

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1- Ibid, p.147.

2- The 1973 oil crisis started on October 15, 1973, when the members of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, proclaimed an oil [embargo](#) "in response to the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

eagerness to cross the ocean in order to get to America and have access to the American dream. As James Truslow Adams<sup>1</sup> shrewdly defined it: *"The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."*

Thus many did not resist answering the call of trade and adventure. Commercial bond first pushed the Arabs to move to the United States. It is said that the first Arabs to set foot on the American soil accompanied the Spanish explorers in the fifteenth century and actively traded with the first colonist. Economic and political alliances were formed in 1700s between North African countries and the American settlers. Algerian merchants supplied the cavalry of George Washington by exporting horses. Morocco was officially the first country which opened its ports to the United States and recognizing its independence. In a letter sent by George Washington, this later expressed his gratitude via a treaty of friendship between Sultan Mohamed III of Morocco and the United States in 1787. (Document 1: The Arab Population in the United States, Region and States 1990/2000.) Since that moment, North African and Middle Eastern trade have had a significant impact on the Arabo-American relationships.

| <b>State/territory</b> | <b>2010 American Census<sup>[11]</sup></b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Arab American Institute (AAI)</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Alabama</u>         | 9,057                                      | 0.189             | 34,308 <sup>[12]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Alaska</u>          | 1,356                                      | 0.191             | 4,464 <sup>[13]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Arizona</u>         | 29,474                                     | 0.461             | 95,427 <sup>[14]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Arkansas</u>        | 5,019                                      | 0.172             | 14,472 <sup>[15]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>California</u>      | 269,917                                    | 0.616             | 817,455 <sup>[16]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Colorado</u>        | 27,526                                     | 0.074             | 51,149 <sup>[17]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Connecticut</u>     | 17,917                                     | 0.501             | 57,747 <sup>[18]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Delaware</u>        | 1,092                                      | 0.122             | 9,000 <sup>[19]</sup>                | No data           |

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1- James Truslow Adams (1878 –1949) was an American writer and historian. It is believed that Adams coined the term "American Dream" in his 1931 book The Epic of America.( available from <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/97/dream/thedream.html> )

| <b>State/territory</b>      | <b>2010 American Census<sup>[11]</sup></b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Arab American Institute (AAI)</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>District of Columbia</u> | 4,810                                      | 0.799             | 10,821 <sup>[20]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Florida</u>              | 114,791                                    | 0.610             | 301,881 <sup>[21]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Georgia</u>              | 25,504                                     | 0.263             | 81,171 <sup>[22]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Hawaii</u>               | 1,661                                      | 0.122             | 4,983 <sup>[23]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Idaho</u>                | 1,200                                      | 0.077             | 7,617 <sup>[24]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Illinois</u>             | 87,936                                     | 0.685             | 256,395 <sup>[25]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Indiana</u>              | 19,049                                     | 0.294             | 46,122 <sup>[26]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Iowa</u>                 | 6,426                                      | 0.211             | 17,436 <sup>[27]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Kansas</u>               | 8,099                                      | 0.281             | 23,868 <sup>[28]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Kentucky</u>             | 10,199                                     | 0.235             | 28,542 <sup>[29]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Louisiana</u>            | 11,996                                     | 0.265             | 50,031 <sup>[30]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Maine</u>                | 3,103                                      | 0.234             | 13,224 <sup>[31]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Maryland</u>             | 28,623                                     | 0.496             | 76,446 <sup>[32]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Massachusetts</u>        | 67,643                                     | 1.033             | 195,450 <sup>[33]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Michigan</u>             | 153,713                                    | 1.555             | 500,000 <sup>[34]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Minnesota</u>            | 22,478                                     | 0.424             | 60,663 <sup>[35]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Mississippi</u>          | 6,823                                      | 0.230             | 20,469 <sup>[36]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Missouri</u>             | 18,198                                     | 0.304             | 51,869 <sup>[37]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Montana</u>              | 1,771                                      | 0.179             | 5,313 <sup>[38]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Nebraska</u>             | 6,093                                      | 0.334             | 25,227 <sup>[39]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Nevada</u>               | 10,920                                     | 0.404             | 37,554 <sup>[40]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>New Hampshire</u>        | 6,958                                      | 0.529             | 25,068 <sup>[41]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>New Jersey</u>           | 84,558                                     | 0.962             | 257,868 <sup>[42]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>New Mexico</u>           | 7,716                                      | 0.375             | 13,632 <sup>[43]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>New York</u>             | 160,848                                    | 0.830             | 449,187 <sup>[44]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>North Carolina</u>       | 33,230                                     | 0.348             | 91,788 <sup>[45]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>North Dakota</u>         | 1,470                                      | 0.186             | 4,410 <sup>[46]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Ohio</u>                 | 65,011                                     | 0.564             | 197,439 <sup>[47]</sup>              | No data           |

| <b>State/territory</b> | <b>2010 American Census<sup>[11]</sup></b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Arab American Institute (AAI)</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Oklahoma</u>        | 9,342                                      | 0.249             | No data                              | No data           |
| <u>Oregon</u>          | 13,055                                     | 0.341             | 41,613 <sup>[48]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Pennsylvania</u>    | 63,288                                     | 0.498             | 182,610 <sup>[49]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Rhode Island</u>    | 7,566                                      | 0.719             | 26,541 <sup>[50]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>South Carolina</u>  | 9,106                                      | 0.197             | 32,223 <sup>[51]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>South Dakota</u>    | 2,034                                      | 0.250             | 6,102 <sup>[52]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Tennessee</u>       | 24,447                                     | 0.385             | 71,025 <sup>[53]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Texas</u>           | 102,367                                    | 0.407             | 274,701 <sup>[54]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>USA</u>             | 1,646,371                                  | 0.533             | 3,700,000 <sup>[62]</sup>            | No data           |
| <u>Utah</u>            | 5,539                                      | 0.200             | 17,556 <sup>[55]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Vermont</u>         | 2,583                                      | 0.413             | 7,749 <sup>[56]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>Virginia</u>        | 59,348                                     | 0.742             | 169,587 <sup>[57]</sup>              | No data           |
| <u>Washington</u>      | 26,666                                     | 0.397             | 8,850 <sup>[58]</sup>                | No data           |
| <u>West Virginia</u>   | 6,329                                      | 0.342             | 16,581 <sup>[59]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Wisconsin</u>       | 11,138                                     | 0.196             | 32,406 <sup>[60]</sup>               | No data           |
| <u>Wyoming</u>         | 397                                        | 0.070             | 1,191 <sup>[61]</sup>                | No data           |

**Source:** U.S. Census 2000([www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf4.pdf))

Unlike many immigrants who were attracted by work opportunities or escaping from religious persecution, or were in search of asylum, the majority of these Arab artisans came to the United States engaged in an enterprise of peddling. Previously informed by their relatives who were already comfortably settled, Arabs had a primary idea about where to go to find job and housing. They were not pulled from their mother country, because the bonds that link them to their friends and relatives were too rigid. However, the wish to improve their family status, in addition to the remoteness and mystery that shaped legendary America, gained the upper hand.

The most significant reason of the Arabic rush was the Israeli Palestinian clash, especially after the instauration of the British Mandatory of Palestine. This later was a legal document for the administration of Palestine, formally approved by the League of Nations in June 1922. In this document the British collaborated with the Jewish

community, and promoted the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Moreover they sustained a huge number of Jewish immigrants to settle in Palestine which led to the ostracism of Palestinians. Therefore, Arabs were purchased from their own land and their products were boycotted by the local Zionist movement.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Arabic speaking countries resonated with great hopes about Arab unity, especially concerning the question of Palestine. However the defeat of the Arab league in the Six Day War shattered all their optimism about the future. Even though it was traumatic to Arabs, this war engendered an unprecedented common sense of unity. Indeed before that event Arabs were not united because of diversity of the religious faiths, dialects, cultures and nationalities. In the post Arab Israeli war and the spreading of the anti Arab sentiment, Arabs started to form cohesive groups, creating associations and organizations to fight prejudice and discrimination perpetrated towards Palestinians.

### **III.1 The Role of the West in the Arab Immigration to the USA:**

Through the process of Western colonization of the Middle East, lots missionaries, travellers, traders, adventurers and educators settled in the Middle East. Colonists felt that they were helping the colonized population by bringing them Christianity and civilization. Unfortunately, reality was different, more often what they brought was conflicts and death. British and American researchers and missionaries settled in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The Middle East like other colonized territories at that time offered colonists, an open market that would garner them a trade surplus. They brought their culture, religion and own institutions like churches and schools. Consequently a large rate of Arabic population converted to Christianity and Protestantism which led to civil conflicts in the Middle East.

America has always welcomed immigrants, mainly for their labour contribution, therefore Americans amplified their effort to lure cheap labour with promises of wealth and freedom. One of the factors that incited Arab Immigration to the United State was the foundation of a Jewish community in Palestine. In 1948, the State of Israel was officially established, thus more than 800,000 Palestinians became refugees, escaping from persecution. Most of these Palestinians, and their families settled in neighbouring countries. In 1953 U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act considered as the first American immigration law

that explicitly mentioned refugees<sup>1</sup> as a category of immigrants. Thanks to this law, over 2000 Palestinian refugees were to be admitted to the United States. This law was extended in 1957 and another 985 Palestinians were admitted as refugees between 1958 and 1963<sup>2</sup>.

**IV- The Settlement Process:** For the majority of immigrants, New York represented the United States. It was for them their host land, this is why, it contained the largest and the most diverse Arab community in the late nineteenth century to such a point that an area in Manhattan was known among Arab community as “little Syria”. Arabs owned businesses and residences where they were publishers, manufacturers and importers of lace, embroidery and lingerie. Commerce that ran little Syria was peddling so between 1880 and 1910 the majority of the new immigrants were peddlers. In her outstanding study entitled “Syrians in the United States” in 1911, Louise Seymour Houghton, wrote about the early Arab immigrants activities:

*“From the charity visitor these peddlers refuse alms resent any well meant but incomprehensible attempt to induce them to change their mode of life, to give up peddling and go into a factory, for example. The two points of views are almost ludicrously, if not tragically, apart. They lie in different plains and are incapable of meeting.”*<sup>3</sup>

Arabs became a so integrating part of the American society that they inspired by Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers who created a Broadway musical entitled “Oklahoma”. The play was about an olive skinned young man Ali Hakim, a Persian peddler who sold goods to farms from a cart<sup>4</sup>. In spite of the pack peddling which was fruitful for Arabs, there were other reasons that pushed them to migrate to the United States; others left to improve themselves economically fleeing the bad economic conditions of the less developed countries. Lots of immigrants travelled overseas seeking for a better living condition and personal advancement in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia. Others escaped oppression, military service and parental authority or they

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1- Refugee in the U.S. constitution refers to any person in a country or area which is neither Communist nor Communist-dominated, who because of persecution, fear of persecution, natural calamity or military operations is out of his usual place of abode and unable to return thereto, who has not been firmly resettled, and who is in urgent need of assistance for the essentials of life or for transportation.

2- <http://www.xtimeline.com/evt/view.aspx?id=1419>

3- Boosahda, Elizabeth, Arab-American faces and voices: the origins of an immigrant community (University of Texas Press, 2003), p.67.

4- *Oklahoma!* Is the first [musical](#) written by Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers in [Oklahoma Territory](#) outside the town of [Claremore](#) in 1906, it tells the story of cowboy Curly McLain and his romance with farm girl Laurey Williams.

were simply craving for adventure. Indeed in the Arab countries, parents had an overwhelming control over their children's life including their marriage.

**IV.1 Early Settlement:** As stated before, at the beginning of the mid 1800s century, Great Syria's economy witnessed a real turning point by the opening of the Suez Canal. This later made the exchange of goods with the Far East so easier that it had a catastrophic impact on local economy. Furthermore, by 1890s, the Lebanese vineyards which were destroyed by Phylloxera,<sup>1</sup> in addition to the increasing rate of population which was not equal to agricultural and industrial productivity made matters worse.

The majority of Arab Christians coming during the first wave escaped from religious persecution. They established in America, a land of democracy, and above all, a land of freedom of religion.<sup>2</sup> They came from countries where religious and state matters go hand in hand. Discrimination was current especially with the decrease of the Ottoman Empire. As much as the Ottoman rulers control declined, the local rulers' authority increased which was used to oppress local people, mainly non Muslims. This hatred against non-Muslims, especially Christians was one of the consequences of Arab departure and the clashes between Christians in Europe and Ottoman rulers. Moreover as the number of immigrants grew up there was also an increasing need of institutions to get Arab immigrants together, such as mosques for Muslims, and churches for Christians.

Lots of Christian Arabs also built churches like the Syrian Orthodox Church established in 1885 in the Eastern part of the United States. By and large few mosques have been created before 1960s, in fact the first mosque was built on the American soil in 1915. According to the Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey, 87 per cent of mosques in the United States were founded within the last three decades.

**IV.2 Second Phase of Settlement:** While the first wave came to obtain material wealth, the second wave came for more ambitious and intellectual opportunities. Arab immigrants of the second influx were obviously better educated, packed with idea about democracy, eager for

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1- Grape phylloxera is a pest of commercial grapevines worldwide, originally native to eastern North America. These tiny, pale yellow sap-sucking insects, related to aphids, feed on the roots and leaves of grapevines depending on the phylloxera genetic strain.

2- Naff, Alixa, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p.87.

education and a better life. From 1965 until 1992, more than 400.000 Arab immigrants arrived to the United States.<sup>1</sup>

After the Second World War, lots of Arab immigrants who were well established American citizens helped their families to join them. A great number among these latter came to improve their education. They came thanks to student visas which would limit their stay on the American soil, obliging them to return home once their education completed. Nevertheless many of them chose to remain there and married American citizens or just because they had the opportunity to obtain a work permit by an employer who would sponsor their right to stay.

**IV.3 The Last Phase of Settlement:** The third influx of immigrants was the largest one due to the relaxation of the immigration laws and quota system. The Pan- Arab movement<sup>2</sup> which arose during the 1950s gave many Arabs pride great and hope about their future. Nevertheless, in 1967 the defeat of the Arab people in the Six Day War (the damn date<sup>3</sup>) brought them disillusionment. Indeed it was the most tragic and affecting date in the history of Arabs who saw then their hopes and their unity shattered the fact that made immigration towards the United States and other non Arab-countries an inevitable alternative.

In addition to the Six Day War, there were clashes within Arab countries that brought about insecurity. The civil war that took place in Lebanon from 1975 to 1992 made 90.000 people move from Lebanon in addition to other thousands of Palestinians, Syrians, Jordanians and Egyptians.<sup>4</sup> The Gulf War in 1991 added many waves of immigrants who move to the United States, escaping Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and caprices.

In many Arab countries, the educational system became upgraded after independence and thus the number of graduates increased. Yet, it was still not adapted to their skills and ambitions, so many left their countries triggering of "Brain Drain" phenomenon. The American educational system answered the needs of Arab immigrants as for their career advancement, placing at their disposal the best engineering training, latest technology and medical advance. During the 1970s the

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1- Kayyali, A. Randa, *The Arab Americans* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), p25.

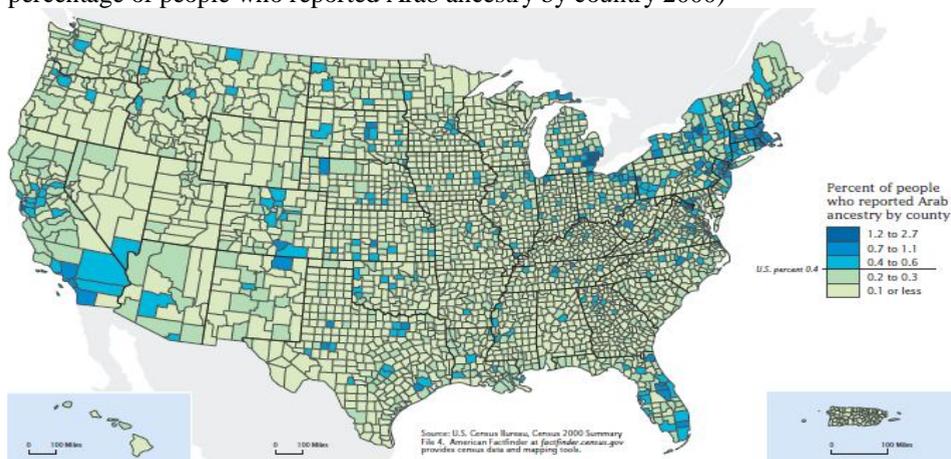
2- A form of cultural nationalism, Pan-Arabism is a movement for unification among the peoples of the Arab World. It is closely connected to Arab nationalism which asserts that the Arabs constitute a single nation. The idea was at its height during the 1960s, and the movement has strongly opposed colonialism and Western political involvement in the Arab world

3- Parrs, Alexandra, *Construction de l'identité arabe américaine : Entre visibilité et mise en scène stratégique*(Editions L'Harmattan, 2005),p.49.

4- Ibid, p.33.

rise of multiculturalism in America created an atmosphere of tolerance and equality among all immigrant groups, giving them the right to express themselves freely and practice their customs, language and faiths freely.

The distribution of the Arab population in America during the beginning of the twenty first century was as follow: 26 per cent are settled in the South, 24 per cent in the Midwest, and finally 22 per cent in the west. 2000 U.S. Census demonstrated that 48 per cent of the Arabic population is concentrated mainly in five states, namely California, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey and New York. Over one decade, Arab population has increased in most states specifically in New York City which gathers the largest Arab community. (Figure 3: Arab ancestry and percentage of people who reported Arab ancestry by country 2000)



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary.

There had been a big racial and political awareness during the late 1960s and early 1970s that have been institutionalized in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed numerous Arab American organizations were established, among them; the Arab American University Graduates, the National Arab American Association, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Arab American Institute<sup>1</sup>. These institutions were founded in order to protect the rights and interests of Arab Americans and at the same time reinforce and diffuse the Arab American identify and heritage for the next future generation. These tasks became a necessary mission especially due to the events in the Middle East, from

1- Naber Nadine Christine, Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: from invisible citizens to visible subjects. Jamal, Amaney A., 1970- N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. 2008.

the oil embargo to hijackings, incorporating the well established defamation of the Western media to relate Arabs with terrorism.

The role of these Arab organizations became primordial especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, since Arab Americans became the targets of hate crimes, racial profiling and discrimination. Consequently after these tragic events, Arab Americans became main spokespersons for protecting in the civil rights in the United States. In addition these associations revealed the misunderstandings that have been implanted in the American society for decades concerning the Arabs. In these battles these associations showed the role of the Arabs as a community and in contributing to the United States in an immeasurable ways as individual citizens, Arab Americans have been and still be an important and worthless piece in the beautiful picture of the American nation.

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