



Middle East Resources

INFORMATION FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE PRECOLLEGIATE LEVEL

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Hyphenated Americans

Arab-Americans



Many Americans identify themselves by a hyphenated title. They call themselves Asian-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Arab-Americans etc. Members of these groups were almost all immigrants or refugees at one time or another; they were people who moved to this country from their native land for the purpose of becoming permanent residents, or escaping turmoil in their own land. The United States has always been a nation of immigrants and refugees, with the exception of descendants of native people living here before the Spanish, French, Dutch, Viking and English explorers arrived on these shores in the 16th and 17th centuries, or those Americans descended from Africans who were forcibly transported to America by slave traders.

Since the establishment of the independent United States in 1776, men, women and children from all over the world have flocked to these shores, landing in the coastal regions, and gradually moving inward to settle new territories. In 1880 the population of the continental United States was slightly above 50,000,000. In 1900 it was just under 76,000,000, a gain of more than 50 percent, but still the smallest rate of population increase for any 20-year period of the 19th century. Much of the population increase was due to the more than 9,000,000 immigrants who entered the United States in the last 20 years of the century, the largest number to arrive in any comparable period up to that time. Immigrants came for many reasons; because of persecution, or seeking a better life, for adventure, or due to a myriad of national, personal and economic problems.

The focus of this issue of Middle East Resources will be on one group of hyphenated Americans, the Arab-Americans; their identity, history and cultural heritage. Arabs are a diverse group of people coming from different countries in the Middle East and North Africa. There are similarities in their culture, as well as great diversity; what binds them as a group is the Arabic Language.

Forerunners

Adele Younis was an American historian, born in 1907 of Syrian immigrant parents. In her book, The coming of the Arabic Speaking People to the United States, there is a fascinating chapter titled "The Forerunners" in which the author traces the earliest Arabic speaking people to reach American shores. Following is a sample of some of these first "Arab-Americans":

11th Century: Hanno "the Cathaginian", a seafaring Phoenician coming from present day Tunisia, may have explored the Atlantic seacoast 400 years before Columbus.

1668-1683: Father Elias of Mosul (Iraq) made the first documented historic journey to Spanish America.

1731: Job Ben Solomom was brought as a slave to Maryland. His bearing and obvious intelligence caught the attention of some influential Americans. Trying to let these patrons know who he was, Job wrote the words "Allah" and "Mohammad" in Arabic, identifying himself as a Muslim. He later wrote a narrative in Arabic describing his life in a well to do African family.

1854: Antonio Bishallany was sent to America by missionaries in Syria. He arrived in New York City in 1854. Bishallany led a full life, studying theology and teaching Arabic, until his early death in 1856 on his 29th birthday.

1856: One of the most colorful Arabic speakers was Philip Tradro. He was also known as "Hadji Ali" because he had made the Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. Americans nicknamed him "Hi Jolly". He reached the coast of Texas in 1856 on a ship carrying 33 camels. These had been purchased by the U.S. military to work in the western desert, and "Hi Jolly" would be one of the trainers. The U.S. had actually purchased 32 camels, but one more was born on the ship and named "Uncle Sam". Hi Jolly stayed in Texas training camels which were used to transport army supplies during the Civil War. The scheme was not very successful and many unsuspecting cavalymen were made seasick by the camels' swaying gait. Philip Tradro died in Arizona in 1902.

Colorful as were the lives of some of these early Arab-Americans, the first real wave of immigrants came in the late 19th century. Three cultural expositions featuring exhibits on the Arab world. in Philadelphia in 1876, St. Louis in 1904, and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, brought over many artisans and workmen. Others, especially from Syria / Lebanon, came looking for opportunity, spurred on by stories told by missionaries about the United States. They came to earn money and stayed to raise American families.

SEEKING ROOTS

Beginning with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, there was a growing interest in acknowledging the roots from which Americans are descended. This, and the idea of accepting and celebrating the varied heritages of Americans, has led to a philosophy of multi-culturalism, which in turn has fueled an interest in identifying oneself as a hyphenated American. This is a very different intention from the early 20th century when new immigrants wanted to put the old country behind them, and insisted that they and their children be identified as "Americans", even to the point of not passing on a knowledge of their native language. Lately, with a recognition of the richness in cultural diversity, there is a stronger desire to hold on to the culture of the "old" country while assimilating to the new culture of the United States. Thus among almost every hyphenated ethnic group there exists a tension over identity. We will look at one such group, the Arab Americans, and their experiences.

ARAB-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Lisa Suheir Majaj, an Arab-American author and poet, wrote an article in Al Jadid, a quarterly publication about Arab culture and art, in the Winter 1999 issue. In "The Hyphenated Author: Emerging Genre of Arab-American Literature" she raises the question whether there is such a thing as Arab-American literature – and the broader question what it means to be Arab-American.

“The Arab-American community, shaped by a century long history of migration, is remarkably diverse. It includes 3rd and 4th generation Americans as well as recent immigrants; people from different countries and different religious denominations; those who speak no Arabic and who speak no English; people who identify primarily with the “Arab” side of their heritage and those who identify primarily with their “American” side. This diversity complicates assessment of what constitutes “Arab-American”

“At the present time there are two viewpoints: the first view that Arab-American identity is in essence a transplanted Arab identity, turning upon a preservation of Arab culture, maintenance of the Arab language, involvement in Middle Eastern politics, and a primary relationship to the Arab world. From this perspective, attenuation of “Arab” characteristics and involvement may be seen as representing a betrayal of Arab heritage and hence of Arab American identity. The second view, however, is that Arab-American identity is intrinsically American and should be understood in relation to the American context and American frameworks of assimilation and multiculturalism. From this perspective, the process of ethnogenesis, the creation of something new and different out of the conjunction of Arab and American culture, is central to Arab-American identity.

“Of course these perspectives are not necessarily opposed: many Arab-Americana engage in political activities on Arab issues and preserve Arab culture in their lives while also

seeking integration into the American context. But there tends to be a discernable orientation toward one or the other side of the hyphen”.

Ms. Majaj's answer to the question of whether Arab-American literature exists, also provides a pertinent description of Arab-American ethnic identity.

“Like Arab-Americans themselves, Arab-American texts are part of Arab culture, part of American culture, and part of something still in the process of being created. Arab-American writers write out of their Arab identity, out of their American identity and out of the identity produced when these two cultures come together. The art that results is Arab-American because it arises from the experience of Arab-Americans – personal or public, “ethnic” or not”.

Recognized Futures

by Lisa Suhair Majaj

Turning to you, my name --
this necklace of gold, these letters
in script I cannot read
this part of myself I long
to recognize—falls forward
into my mouth.

You call my daily name, *Lisa*,
the name I've finally declared
my own, claiming a heritage
half mine: corn fields silver
in ripening haze, green music
of crickets, summer light sloping
to dusk on the Iowa farm.

This other name fills my mouth,
a taste faintly metallic,
blunt edges around which my tongue
moves tentatively: *Suhair*,
an old-fashioned name,
little star in the night. The second girl,
small light on a distanced horizon.

Throughout childhood this rending split:
continents moving slowly apart,
rift widening beneath taut limbs.

A contested name, a constant
longing, evening star rising mute
through the Palestine night.
Tongue cleft by impossible languages,
fragments of narrative fractured
to loss, homelands splintered
beyond bridgeless rivers,
oceans of salt.

From these fragments I feel
a stirring, almost imperceptible.
In the morning light these torn
lives merge: a name on your lips,
on mine, softly murmured,
mutely scripted, both real
and familiar, till I cannot
distinguish between your voice
and my silence, my words
and this wordless knowledge,
morning star rising
through lightening sky,
some music I can't quite
hear, a distant melody,
flute-like, *nai* through
the olives, a cardinal calling,
some possible language
all our tongues can sing.

THE ARABIC QUARTER OF CHICAGO

*Ray Hanania is an award winning Palestinian American writer and author. He spent 18 years as a Chicago newspaper political writer and currently is vice president of public affairs at a Chicago Public Relations Company. He is the publisher of the Arab American View newspaper, and has served in a variety of positions in the Arab American community including as national president of the Palestinian American Congress. His columns are archived on the web at www.hanania.com. The following passages are from his forth-coming book, *The Door of God: The Story of Chicago's Arab American Community*.*

“Plymouth Rock”

“Many of the early Arab immigrants to America were, initially, Lebanese Christians, who fled persecution in their homelands. They came to America in the middle of the 19th Century. A conflict with the larger Muslim Druze community in 1860 resulted in the total destruction of the Christian village of Zahlah. Some 22,000 Christian Arabs were killed. Many of the Survivors fled to other Arab cities, such as Damascus in Syria, and then were more than likely to continue on to the United States. Generally, Muslims and Christians had maintained good relations, and conflicts like the Zahlah massacre were rare. Some believed that the Ottoman Turks were involved in inciting this conflict. Nonetheless, the event did spark the first major wave of Arabs to come to America and Chicago at the end of the 19th Century.

“This early Syrian-Lebanese community settled near 18th Street and Michigan Avenue, which soon became known as Chicago’s Arabic Quarter. Since almost all Arab-Americans to Chicago arrived there, it is sometimes referred to as the “Plymouth Rock” of the Chicago Arab American community. It continued to serve as the arrival point for new Arab and Muslim immigrants through the mid-1940s. In the 1940s, it was centered around the Mecca Restaurant on South Michigan Avenue, where Arabian food specialties were served and Arab merchants would congregate and share stories and find comfort.

“The Syrian-Lebanese were mostly Christian Arabs of the Maronite faith. In the early years they rented an apartment to conduct their church services. They did not have a priest of their own, but would invite Arab priests passing through Chicago to perform the religious services. In 1905 they were able to engage a full time priest who offered services from the basement of a local church. The Syrian-Lebanese settlers also established a Syrian Club. The journal, *Survey*, in its 1911 four part series on Syrians in America, estimated that there were 1200 Syrians (the name included all Arabs) living in Chicago, compared to 6,000 in New York, and only 56 in Duluth, Minnesota. There were 15 Arab owned stores in Chicago.

“Typical of the racism directed at Arab American immigrants in these years was a section in *Chicago Confidential*, a book on Chicago published in 1950. Under the heading, “Sons of the Prophet”, the authors introduce their readers to this Middle East section of the city.

You won't find any camels at 18th and Michigan. Chicago's small Arabic quarter is surrounded by Automobile Row. If you can digest such, there are several native restaurants serving Near Eastern delicacies which you are supposed to eat with your hands. Arabs sell tapestry and rugs, wholesale and retail. Many merchants who say they are Arabs (because business is business) are not. You will find no orgies out of the Arabian Nights here. Chicago's Arabs don't keep harems and if they did you wouldn't care to look twice at their women. They wouldn't be to your taste. The chief past time is drinking thick, black coffee and playing cards.

Knocking on the door of God... Yatlah al-Bab al-Allah

“Many of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants began as door-to-door peddlers. The Arab peddler was an extension of the Arab merchant in the great suqs, the open air markets of the Middle East. It was strenuous work and required long hours of walking carrying a heavy suitcase of merchandise, usually bed spreads, shirts, combs, and brushes. It was as hard as the work they left behind, but they found more opportunity in America. The early Arab peddlers referred to their work as “knocking on (or opening) the door of God”, yatlah al-bab al-Allah. American customs were new to these merchants but they quickly discovered that they had to satisfy the demands of the local politicians. “We had to go there for our permits to peddle merchandise from our suitcases,” recalled Hassan Haleem, the patriarch of a large family of Muslim Palestinians who immigrated to this country at the turn of the century. ” We had to pay them the registration fee, and a small fee for them, personally. Then, we could peddle our wares on the street. The permit would be fixed to the suitcase.”

1893 Columbian Exposition

“One of the first Arabs that many Chicagoans, and other Americans, came to know may well have been the make-believe character, Gamal El Din El Yahbi. El Yahbi was created by the sponsors of the 1893 Columbian Exposition to help Americans experience the excitement and culture of the Arab World. El Yahbi “owned” an elegant home that was located in the center of the “Street in Cairo” which was one of the main attractions of the 1893 Columbian Exposition and located at the center of the fair’s Midway Plaisance. Cairo Street was a composite of many different images that a visitor might see while visiting Cairo, Egypt, and other Arab countries in the Middle East. It reflected the lifestyles of the early 17th Century Arabs and was designed by Max Herz, the official government architect for the Khedive of Egypt.

“This reconstructed Arab city featured a mosque with its massive doors and ornamentation. It was built to the precise dimensions of an existing mosque in Cairo, minus the towering minaret where the muezzin would call the faithful to prayer. The street itself was lined with buildings and storefronts, built with balconies and ornate facades, portals and mosaic designs, and overlooking a fountain and an open air market filled with tethered camels and donkeys that fairgoers could ride. There were sixty-one shops on the street, selling souvenirs from the Middle East

“Cairo Street also featured a 3800 BCE Tomb of the 5th Egyptian Dynasty, the ancient Temple of Luxor, and mummies from the 16th century BCE. Living in Cairo Street were 180 Egyptians, Nubians and Sudanese. A highlighted feature was the many storied home of Gamal El Din El Yahbi who was described as a “Mohammedan of the time”. (The word “Mohammedan” is an old term used by people who did not understand that Muhammad was a prophet of Islam and not a God to be worshipped. Members of the Islamic faith are correctly called Muslims). Each day they would offer two performances of sword dancing and candle dancing accompanied by musicians. There were also conjurers, astrologers, fortune tellers, and snake charmers. A pamphlet prepared for fairgoers concluded, “When the Columbian Exposition shall have become a thing of the past and its memories hazy with the flight of time, there shall be one spot which shall remain brighter than all the rest, that one will be its beautiful Cairo Street, in the Midway Plaisance”.

Palestinians and Jordanians Follow

“The majority of Arabs living in Chicago now are of Palestinian and Jordanian origins. The Palestinians came predominantly from two villages in Palestine called Beitunia and Ramallah. These twin cities are located next to each other in the West Bank just north of Jerusalem. Beitunia was the Muslim village and Ramallah the Christian village. Beitunia Muslims now constitute the largest community of Arabs in Chicago. They began arriving in Chicago around 1910. Palestinian immigration from Ramallah to Chicago began in 1920. It was common for an affluent businessman to lead the migration by opening restaurants in newer areas. These restaurants became the magnets for later immigrants. As the years passed, the immigrants and their children spread out into numerous different neighborhoods. They established their own community centers and places of worship.

The First Mosque

“Muslim Arabs built their first mosque in the spring of 1956. The event was written up in the Chicago Tribune.

The Mosque Foundation of Chicago has purchased a home of its own which will be the first mosque in Chicago, according to Hassan Haleem, secretary-treasurer of the foundation. He said the building, a former church at 6500 [South] Stewart Ave., was purchased from the South Side association for \$100,000. [The Mosque will service] many families from Arabian countries, the majority from Palestine, during the last few years. The society was formed two years ago by 10 or 15 families.

Haleem said there were about 100 Islamic families on the south and southwest side, including more than 200 children. To continue their customs, to follow and practice their religion, and to instill these habits together with the Arabic language in the minds of their children, they felt a great need for forming a society, Haleem said. Their religion has this creed: “There is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his Messenger.”

“The Palestinian Christians from Ramallah, along with several Christian Jordanian families also established a place for worship. By 1970, St. George Orthodox Church in Oak Park, was drawing parishioners from as far away as Indiana. In the late 1980s, the church relocated to Cicero, Illinois. While churches and mosques became the center of community activity for various Arab groups, they did not serve specific groups exclusively. St. George Church, for example, attracted not only Ramallah Christians, but also Christians from other denominations, and other Palestinian cities and Arab countries. The church services were, and still are, conducted in the Arabic language.

Chicago’s Arab Population Growth

Three studies of Chicago’s Arab American communities were conducted by doctorate students in Chicago, in 1950, 1952 and 1976. Because Arab Americans were not included as a minority designation in the US Census documents, and because so few studies existed outside of the Arab American community, these documents present the most accurate glimpse into the lives of Arab Americans during those periods. It is also important to note that prior to 1897 immigrants from the Middle East were classified as Turks or as Turkish, since their countries were part of the Ottoman Empire. This made it even more difficult to track pre-1900 Arab settlement. In 1976, the Arab population of Chicago was approximately 15,000. Today, as a result of increased immigration since 1976, it is estimated that the Chicago area’s Arab American community actually number around 150,000. Figures for the state range between 350,000 and 450,000.”

ARABS IN THE BOSTON AREA

“Bags and Suitcases”

Dr. Evelyn Menconi, whose parents emigrated from Syria as teen-agers, was a teacher and reading consultant in the Boston Public Schools. Since retiring she has taken an active part in promoting Arab-American culture through the work of the William G. Abdalah Memorial Library, established in her brother's memory, and as an educational consultant to a cable television program called "The Arabic Hour. Dr. Menconi also edits a library newsletter, a recent issue of which contained her memory of growing up Arab-American in West Roxbury, a part of Boston, Massachusetts.

(The Arabic Hour, <http://www.arabic.hour.org>)

My Father's Bible

My parents were teenagers when they first migrated to the United States. They met in Boston in my father's dry goods store when she dropped in to make a purchase. His store was located in the first immigrant settlement in the South Cove of Boston. The Syrian-Lebanese colony had been established in the late 1870s and included a number of stores with goods imported from Syria. Not realizing she was of Syrian background, my father made a comment about her to his associate, Hikel, who worked with him. It was a flattering comment but my mother did not let on that she understood Arabic. Then my father discovered she was staying at his aunt's rooming house, where he also lived. One Sunday morning he left his room door open when he heard her coming down the stairs, and began a conversation. Now, among the things my parents brought from Syria were a wooden cross, a worn Arabic Bible, and a Protestant Arabic-English hymn book. My father had been reading passages from the Bible, which for him was a way to improve the English he was learning at night school. He would compare the English and Arabic Bibles to learn new words. Mamma tells me that he planned to marry if he could find someone who could read and write Arabic. He asked her to read a passage from the Bible. She passed the test, and liked what she saw in this good-looking blue-eyed businessman. After they were married, Papa's special olive wood cross was always tied to his bedpost and his old Bible was given daily use from the time he met my mother.

Tastes of Syria

In the bags and suitcases my parents, and all immigrants, carried across the seas, were cherished reminders of their homeland. And growing up in America in the first half of the twentieth century, I remember many things in our home that connected me and my Arab-American family to Syria; antiques, mementos, domestic utensils, religious articles, photographs, and foods. Of course we ate Syrian bread, a must for wrapping morsels of food, dipping into sauces, and carrying a tasty parcel of food to the lips. We made

fatoosh or tossed salad with toasted bread. We had *kuzbara* (coriander), *mahlab*, or wild cherry kernel ground up for pastries, *burghol* (crushed wheat), and dried *laban* for making yogurt. We made our own yogurt from milk. It was necessary to have a small amount of yogurt as a 'starter'. Yogurt needs refrigeration which few people had in those days. If it had to be transported a great distance, some ready made yogurt was put onto a cloth and was spread out for the yogurt to dry completely - so it would not spoil. When dry, the cloth was folded with the dry yogurt inside and carried to the new destination. Yogurt cheese was made in cotton bags - the yogurt was poured into the bag, the bag had a drawstring at top. The bag was closed and the string hung on the faucet so that the whey dropped into the sink and what was left in the bag was a yogurt cheese called *labanee*. It was delicious spread on bread. Sometimes it was put into a Syrian bread pocket, with a quarter of a cucumber cut lengthwise and a little mint - fresh or dried for a great cucumber sandwich. Anyone coming from the old country always brought *kishik*, a combination of yogurt and crushed wheat for making soup, and *zaatar*, a combination of herbs; thyme, sesame seeds, and sumac, used as a savory topping for bread dough. For cooking there was a utensil for coring squash called a *manqara*, a marble crock called a *jirrin* for pounding meat and crushed wheat to make *kibbee*, wooden mashers for vegetables, and a pot for brewing Turkish coffee. My mother had a *mandil* or triangular kerchief which she always tied around her head during food preparation. People from the Middle East benefited greatly from living at the crossroads of civilization and the great trade routes. There were always a wonderful array of foods and spices in the markets; cumin for stews, *misk* or gum Arabic for making Syrian ice cream, and *kuzbara* or coriander as well as dried yogurt power, and orange blossom flavoring.

'Small' is Best

As long as I can remember, we had coosa (marrow squash) in our garden at Heron Street in West Roxbury. It was not available in the market in those days and you had to grow your own or buy it from someone who was lucky enough to have available seeds. This light green squash is picked when it is small and tender. It is cored and usually stuffed with a rice and lamb meat mixture, then simmered in a tomato broth or mint yogurt sauce. We had this delectable treat every Sunday, all summer, with stuffed grape leaves. When we went on outings, a pot of this went along with us, wrapped in newspaper in the car trunk to keep it warm for lunchtime serving. My brothers sold squash and were always grateful for the customers who didn't scorn the ones that were picked a little large. The smaller the better! It was necessary to pick them twice a day to keep them small. My mother was great at that. My brother Fred to this day still plants squash and gives it to his special friends who are always delighted to get a bag of *coosa*. (He is well rewarded

with ready-cooked squash and baked *kibbee* in return). My mother and brothers would let prize squashes mature on the vine, remove the seeds and dry them for the next year. Many of our friends and neighbors shared their seeds with each other. They also shared prize Syrian cucumber seeds – the long, tender cukes that are eaten skin and all. We still have grapevines and mint patches in our garden that help with the church bazaar needs each year.

The Hubbly-Bubbly

Among the household antiques I recall the crystal base of an old *narghile* or water-pipe. My parents never used water-pipes but they kept them on hand in deference to older people who visited us. In later years I took a visiting cousin from Lebanon to the top of the Prudential building and, pointing in the direction of the South End, described the coffeehouse area on Shawmut Avenue. She told me that what she missed most when she was away from Lebanon was her water-pipe. I took her to a coffeehouse, boldly entered this male domain, and purchased tobacco and charcoal, much to the amusement of the customers. My brother Ernest who had been stationed at an air base in Libya had brought me a lovely *narghile* as a souvenir. So the next day, at our family picnic, I photographed my two cousins, Yvonne and Samia, contentedly puffing away and sharing the delights of my water-pipe. It had never been used previously and I was glad for their sake it was in working order. I often think back to my father's cousin, Tom Maloof, who at one short period had made enough money to enable him to spend leisure time with his pipe. He called Mama periodically on the phone and I would hold the receiver till she came from working in the garden. As I waited, I listened to the rhythmic hubbly-bubbly and the 'pfft' as he breathed out. I could picture him sitting pasha-like on his comfortable divan, with the phone and the *narghile* at his side.

Coffee and Hospitality

Continental Crafts was a wonderful importing business in Cambridge. It was owned by Omar Khudari, who traveled extensively in the Middle East, shopping for antiques, artifacts and traditional clothing, as well as handcrafts and household items. He was a great source when we needed Arabic objects to sell or display at international festivals. He knew the origins and history of each item and enjoyed sharing his knowledge. During a program we offered in the Semitic Museum at Harvard University, Mr. Khudari explained and demonstrated the traditional Arab custom of hospitality, serving freshly made coffee to guests. Using a beautiful old Bedouin coffee grinder, he drummed a haunting rhythm while he prepared the drink. He explained that, according to custom,

each head of household took a turn inviting the elders to coffee with an individualized rhythm on his drum that identified the tent that was hosting the 'coffee break.' There was also a special tray with traditional tools for roasting the coffee beans, a long-handled pot for brewing coffee, and small attractive cups to serve it in. Festivals and holidays were times to offer hospitality and baking goodies was an important part of the preparation. A favorite cookie is *ma'amoul*, a dome shaped pastry stuffed with nuts or dates. Woman had wooden cookie molds of different sizes, with carved decorations in the hollow for turning out 'designer' cookies. Serrated tongs were also used for decorating the tops of cookies for those with the patience for this painstaking artistry!

Decoration and Art

Syria was famous for its silk industry in the late 19th century, and among other mementos in my home, from the old country, was a lovely wall-hanging made from the cocoons of silkworms. We also cherished a rough *leefie*. This is called a luffa in English and is made from the fibrous skeleton of the fruit of the luffa plant. It was used as a sponge for a good body scrub. Treasured in some households were the pens and inks for calligraphy, which is the art of beautiful writing. It is used in books and manuscripts, as well as in architecture, and in the designs found on beautiful objects. Musa Asaf is especially remembered in the Boston area as a fine calligrapher. His art graced many a living room, as well as the meeting place of the Syrian Ladies Aid Society, where groups gathered for meetings, fundraisers, *sahras* (socials) and sometimes wakes for the dead.

New immigrants brought henna, a reddish-brown powder used as a dye to add luster to a woman's hair. It was also the tradition of brides and their guests to use henna to paint decorative designs on their hands and feet for wedding celebrations. And, they brought their handwork. Syrian women were highly skilled at dressmaking, crocheting, tatting, and embroidering. I imagine they may have had sewing materials that helped pass the time on ship. They certainly were able to make a great contribution to Boston's garment industry with such skills as smocking, embroidering, and beading as well as sewing, which they had perfected in the homeland. I recall groups of women in the community busy with their needlework as they visited together socially. My mother taught us how to embroider, but I must say that it was my late sister Mary who was really good at it. Her knitted socks and crocheted afghans are still keeping us warm.

Music and Song

I remember with pleasure our wind-up Victrola, this was before tape decks and CDs, which played the old 78 rpm records, and the sound of Arabic voices – Um Kulthum, Fareed Al-Atrash and his sister Asmahan, Nadir Haddad, and later Tony Abelahad, We had many enjoyable evenings, called *sahras*, where family and friends gathered together, usually with food and casual entertainment. Often clubs or churches had *sahras* that were informal fund-raisers - they told stories or had poetry recitations, singing and dancing. I loved to go to a *mahrajan*. This was a larger get together, held outdoors to enjoy the countryside. There would be dancing, entertainment, games, and delicious foods like shish-kebab, or cubes of lamb, pepper, tomatoes and onions cooked on a stick over a fire. Many people who came from Syria lived in rural villages and small cities where they enjoyed the outdoors. Moving into big cities was a hard change and they took every opportunity to get outdoors and enjoy barbecues and picnics. Almost every Sunday during the summer, we attended outings sponsored by churches and clubs. There was wonderful live music for doing the *dubkee* a line dance, and listening to the musicians playing their Oriental music to the delight of the crowds who attended. They were completely caught up in the nostalgia of homeland memories. Sometimes they clapped in rhythm with the music or sang along or called out endearments to the musicians. Ethnomusicologist Ann Rasmussen loved early Arab-American music and, with great dedication, interviewed the musicians and preserved the music on a compact disk so that we are able to keep on enjoying these Arab-American artists.

Sharing Our Culture

As time went by, I became an avid collector of materials to use in educational and informational programs. We have used them on many occasions and shared them with other groups. It is a wonderful way to show that we Arab-Americans have inherited a warm and beautiful culture, and that the Arabs have made many worthwhile contributions to Western civilization in the applied arts as well as the fine arts, the sciences, and literature.



Discussion Questions:

1. Do you consider yourself a hyphenated American? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. America now has quotas on immigration, What are the pros and cons of this policy?
3. What is the difference between an immigrant and a refugee?
4. Lisa Suhair in her poem about her American-Arab identity, writes about the conflict of identity she feels within her. Discuss your reactions to the poem.
5. In Ms. Suhair's article, what does the word "ethnogenesis" mean? What are some examples of this phenomenon in American culture?
6. Why can we not accurately count the historic immigration of Arabs? Do you think a census should ask people to identify their ethnic group?
7. Why do you think many new immigrants in the past, and today, became peddlers, or opened up small businesses of their own? What jobs are open to new immigrants?

Student activities:

1. Write a paper on one American immigrant. It may be a famous person, a member of your family, or someone you know. What were his reasons for coming to America? What did she find different /similar? What does he miss most of life in his native land, and what does he like best of American life?
2. Research and prepare for a debate on one of the following topics. Take a stand, pro or con. Be prepared to defend your position.
 - All immigrants should assimilate into American society as quickly as possible.
 - Bilingual classes are necessary for new immigrants.
3. Choose one country of the Middle East and, using almanacs, the internet, and United States government statistics, write a report on immigration by people coming from the country of your choice.
4. Read the quotation on page 6. In a short essay analyze it for material that might offend an Arab-American.
5. Churches and synagogues are more common in many cities than are mosques. Find out what is the nearest city/town in your area in which Muslims have an established place of worship. Write an article about the foundation of this mosque as a newspaper item, using the formula; who, what, when, where, why. Use back issues of town papers, or annual reports, or contact the mosque.
6. Select an event from Dr. Menconi's story of her immigrant parents and illustrate it, either as one drawing, or as a cartoon strip.
7. Have each member of the class select one of the food dishes mentioned in "Bags and Suitcases". In groups of two or three, prepare their dish at home and bring it to class for a tasting party. Play Arab music tapes while enjoying the food.

