

Continuity and Change in the Arab American Population, 1980-2006

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The past quarter century has witnessed a huge expansion in studies of the major immigrant and ethnic groups in the U.S. In particular, much research effort has been devoted to documenting and explaining the rapid increases in Asian and Latino American populations, as well as assessing the potential impact of this immigration on American society (e.g. Bean and Stevens, 2003; Massey et al., 2003; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Xie and Goyette, 2004; Zúñiga and Hernández-Léon, 2005). The social and economic adaptation of immigrants has also figured as a prominent research theme (e.g. Foner et al., 2000; Levitt and Waters, 2002; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut and Portes, 2001). Arab immigration, long a neglected dimension in U.S. ethnic history (Pulcini, 1993), has recently garnered more research interest. However, this has mostly involved community studies, many conducted by Arab organizations or using their data. Scholarly analysis of Arab Americans remains limited in scope, with almost no studies based on nationally representative data.

Arab Americans constitute a small ethnic group that has experienced rapid growth over the last few decades. A detailed assessment of the changing profile of Arab peoples in the U.S. is sorely needed, not least to better inform knowledge and debate about a group much misunderstood, distrusted and stigmatized, as well as now much in the news. 'Arab Americans' include persons of diverse national origins, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, but share a cultural and linguistic heritage. Previous research has established that Arab Americans are a growing presence and, as a group, are younger, more educated, earn higher incomes than the U.S. adult population, and also have high rates of intermarriage (Kulczycki and Lobo, 2001; 2002). These and other findings (Read 2004; Ajrouch and Jamal 2007) suggest an increasingly assimilated ethnic population. On the other hand, Arab Americans have faced pervasive negative stereotypes, recently compounded by association with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Jamal and Naber 2008).

This study analyzes continuity and change in the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Arab Americans over recent decades. Our primary focus is on the most recent data from the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), but we also reference data from the last three decennial censuses, 1980-2000. We document differences in these characteristics by nativity, as well as between Arab and all Americans. Census data provide the most reliable information for making intra- and inter-group comparisons, especially for small immigrant groups. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first application of ACS data looking at Arab Americans. Further, we evaluate the patterns, trends and differentials outlined further below in light of what they show about the social and economic adaptation of this population. Our discussion additionally reflects upon some of the similarities and contrasts between this situation and that of Arab and Muslim immigrants and their descendants in Europe. We first provide a brief overview of Arab immigration into the United States to help contextualize the analysis and discussion that follow.

Arab immigration into the United States in historical perspective

Many Arab Americans descend from the first wave of overwhelmingly Christian immigrants from present-day Lebanon and Syria that began at the end of the nineteenth century. These early migrants fled Ottoman persecution as well as economic and demographic pressures in feudal states; they also moved for personal advancement and to earn enough to prosper in their homelands (Hooglund 1987; Naff, 1984; Suleiman, 1999). Some made lasting cultural contributions, notably the internationally renowned Lebanese-born poet and mystic, Khalil Gibran. Many were poor and uneducated and took to peddling as an alternative to factory or farm work; a legacy of this entrepreneurial motivation is that, as will be shown here, many Arab Americans are well represented in commerce to this day. These early migrants shared the faith tradition of most Americans, facilitating their acculturation into U.S. society, while their affiliations with Eastern Rite and Orthodox churches helped strengthen their ethnic identification. Although most early Arab immigrants thought of themselves as sojourners, sharply restrictive quota systems introduced after World War I curtailed immigration from Arab source countries and led to increased assimilation.

A second wave of Arab immigration followed the lifting of U.S. immigration quotas in 1965 that opened the door to Arab and other non-European peoples (Smith and Edmonston, 1997; Lobo and Salvo, 2004). These new arrivals came from many source countries, and not only from the Greater Syria region (especially present-day Lebanon). They included Muslims as well as Christians. A large number entered from countries destabilized by conflict, such as Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories. Others came to pursue educational or economic opportunities. With continued chain migration, increased Arab nationalism, and widespread concern about events in their former homelands and their adopted country's involvement in the region, a reinforcement of Arab and Arab American identity occurred. However, the emergence of negative Arab stereotypes in the 1970s also attached a measure of stigma to this identity in American society. The desire to avoid such prejudice doubtless prompted many Arab Americans to blend in quietly into their new homeland.

American immigration and census authorities have previously classified immigrants from Arab-speaking countries as Turks, Arabians, Asians, other Asians, Syrians, and Syrian-Lebanese. The terms Arab and/or Middle Easterner were adopted more recently. These manifold changes in terminology and classification indicate both a certain lack of understanding about Arab Americans and Arab culture and, arguably, the lack of a distinct and enduring ethnic identity. In addition, claims made by U.S. legal and immigration authorities in 1914, that "Syrians," like "other Asians," had no right to naturalization and citizenship because they did not belong to the white race, traumatized the Arab American population (Hooglund, 1987). Most recently, Arabs also became the victims of numerous hate crimes, ethnic and religious profiling following the events of 9/11 (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Chishti et al. 2003; Jamal and Naber 2008). Only a year earlier in 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau identified Arab Americans as one population in need of a special outreach effort and prepared promotional materials in Arabic to improve the response rate and, thereby, the ethnicity count. However, concerns

about personal and family security may impede present and future efforts by the Census Bureau to build trust among Arab Americans.

This study has four objectives. First, we examine current demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Arab Americans as defined by ancestry and country of birth. We define 'Arab' to include all 22 Arab League member states; overwhelming majorities in all these populations identify themselves as Arabs. Second, we assess changes in these characteristics over recent decades, spanning three censuses and the newly implemented ACS survey. Third, we compare immigrant and U.S.-born Arab Americans, and both groups to the overall U.S. population. This enables assessment of whether Arab Americans exhibit distinct demographic and socio-economic characteristics that differentiate them from the rest of the U.S. population. We disaggregate our analyses by gender and also compare the characteristics of major Arab ethnicities, to the extent possible given existing sample size constraints. Lastly, we evaluate the evidence assembled for what it shows about the assimilation path of Arab Americans.

Data and methods

To achieve these objectives, we use both the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files from the 1980-2000 decennial censuses, as well as the 2006 ACS, to extract data on Arab Americans. This permits examination of recent changes as well as continuities in the profile of this ethnic group. Arab Americans are defined by ancestry and place of birth: those persons who reported their first or second ancestry was from one of the 22 Arab League states, or that they were born in one of those countries.¹ This approach permits a more faithful and accurate representation of the Arab American population. As mentioned above, Arab Americans have reasons to be wary of government officialdom, and Arab immigrants may encounter language difficulties and come from countries with oppressive regimes where the confidentiality of official records cannot be assumed. Hence, any definition that is likely to restrict further the criteria by which Arab Americans are classified will lead to a more severe undercount of this group. In particular, such data would likely underestimate members of the second generation or higher.

By comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau recently released its first reports on Arab Americans based on responses to the 2000 U.S. census. The first report (Cruz and Brittingham, 2003) focused on the geographic distribution of this population and the second profiled Arab Americans across other variables as well (Brittingham and Cruz, 2005). These reports, however, provide only limited comparisons with 1990 data and define Arab Americans inconsistently. The first report estimated a total of 1.2 million Arab Americans, based on responses from those who indicated sole or partly Arab ancestry. The second report counted 850,000 Arab Americans after considering all people who reported having only Arab ancestries and excludes those who are only part

¹ The Arab League states include Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and the Comoros.

Arab. This definition is particularly likely to have underestimated those who will be less inclined to report their primary or secondary ancestry as Arab. The resulting estimates produced by the Census Bureau are also problematic in terms of their compositional base. For example, the Census Bureau ignores ancestry responses listing Comoros Islander, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan. Several of these responses are in practice inconsequential, but our analysis indicates a steadily growing presence of Somalis in the United States, as discussed further below.

The analysis of income and employment variables is restricted to the principal working age groups (21-59 years) for men and women. This age range is sufficiently broad to ensure an adequate number of cases in all the major categories examined. The unweighted sample size of our Arab American PUMS files from 1980, 1990, and 2000 are 35,588, 46,767, and 62,029 respectively. The 2006 ACS data yields a sample size of 15,644 Arab Americans. We first examine the total size and growth of the population over the study period, as well as its breakdown by major Arab American ethnicities, before analyzing continuity and change in other demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Several limitations to this analysis should be noted, in common with other work based on census data. Firstly, some categories, notably occupational groupings, have varied over the census years and are not strictly comparable in all cases over time. Second, although census data are very helpful for analyzing the Arab American population and provide the most accurate and representative information, they cannot depict how generationally complex this population is, nor all aspects of its diversity. In particular, the U.S. census does not capture information on religion. It is known that while earlier Arab immigrants came from countries with large extant Christian populations such as Lebanon and Syria, newer arrivals come often from heavily Muslim countries. Yet even these straightforward dichotomies may afford too simplistic characterizations. Arabs belong to many religions and there are further distinctions within each of these. Most Arab Americans are Christian, be they Catholics, Orthodox, Copts, or members of some other groups. Meanwhile, Arab American Muslims are split between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and interpretations of these traditions vary between individuals' origin countries. Arabs may also be Druze or Jewish.

FINDINGS

Growth and compositional changes

The Arab American population grew two-and-a-half times in size over 1980-2006, from 711,760 to 1,814,743 (Table 1). Despite such rapid growth, the Arab American population still constitutes a small ethnic minority, comprising only 0.6% of the total U.S. population. Nevertheless, this fraction has doubled from 0.31% in 1980 and, notwithstanding the traumas wrought on by the events of 9/11, the Arab American population grew 24% over the most recent seven year period, 2000-06.

--Table 1 about here: Arab American pop. growth, 1980-2006--

The changing composition of Arab Americans by ancestry and country of birth is highlighted in Table 1. Two observations are striking. First, several ancestries continue to account for most Arab Americans, but this concentration has eroded over time. Secondly, the migrant flows have become increasingly diversified over time. The two largest Arab ancestries remain the Lebanese and Syrians, reflecting their longer history of immigration to the U.S. However, although the Lebanese have accounted for the largest numeric expansion over the entire period, their share has declined from 42% to 28% of all Arab Americans and has eroded especially since the early 1990s. This decline coincides with the end of the Lebanese civil war and the start of post-war reconstruction efforts. The share of Syrians also declined over this period, despite sustained flows.

Conversely, the share of other Arab groups rose to three in five of all Arab Americans by 2006. These groups include Egyptians (11%), Iraqis (7%), Moroccans and Somalians (6% each), Jordanians (5%), and Palestinians (4%). Among these groups, Egyptians accounted for the greatest numeric increase over the census years, including the largest net gain (72,360) during the 1990s. Since then, their proportionate share has stabilized. The proportion of Iraqis held steady over the total period, with immigration declining throughout the 1980s and recovering in the 1990s. There were significant gains in the proportions of Jordanians and Palestinians, but the reported number of Palestinians fell over 2000-2006, possibly reflecting the Census Bureau's decision to end in 2000 its listing of a place of birth code for the Palestinian territories. Perhaps the most striking rise has been in the number of Somalis who now account for almost 6% of Arab Americans (up from 0.1% in 1980). No other Arab group made up more than 3% of all Arab Americans, although there have been sustained increases in the numbers of Sudanese and Yemenis (not shown).

The number of Arab Americans born overseas and those born in the United States have been about equal since 2000. However, the 2006 share of U.S.-born Arab Americans (52%) is down seven percentage points since 1990 as a result of increased immigration flows from Arab source countries. The Lebanese and Syrians have relatively high proportions of U.S.-born citizens (72% and 58%, respectively) that have fallen over time, indicating that immigration has rejuvenated even the most established Arab-descendant populations in the U.S. Most other major Arab ancestry groups tended to be about 25-35% US-born with the notable exception of Palestinians, although this again may be an artifact of the failure to specify a place-of-birth code for this group in the 2000 census. Overall, 80% of Arab Americans were U.S. citizens, and of this total, nearly two-thirds acquired citizenship by birth or parentage, and the rest were naturalized citizens.

Age, sex, and marital structure

We next consider the age and sex composition of the Arab American population. Its median age stood at 31 years in 2006, 5 years younger than for all Americans. Arab Americans born in the U.S. had a median age of 18 years, whereas the median age of foreign-born Arab Americans was 39 years, similar to the U.S.-foreign-born population as a whole. Arab American women had a median age of 30 years, seven years less than all American women. In all, 30% of the Arab American population comprised children

under 18 years of age, compared with 26% of the general U.S. population. Another 8% were aged 65 years and over, whereas 12% of all Americans were elderly.

Arab Americans are disproportionately male, with an overall sex ratio of 113 males to 100 females as compared to 97 males to 100 females for the total U.S. population. The Arab American sex ratio is comparable to that in 1990 (119) and in 1980 (115). The sex ratio among foreign-born Arabs (125) continues to reflect higher numbers of men among Arab immigrants, although it has fallen from 135 in 2000. It would seem that the sharp gender imbalance within the Arab American immigrant pool has ebbed somewhat, perhaps due to increased family reunification flows. Nonetheless, the skewed sex ratios suggest that many Arab American men may marry outside their group and their children are likely to have weaker ties to their ancestral homes. Among Arab Americans under the age of 18, the sex ratio was 106, comparable to that for all American children (105). The sex ratio drops more gradually with age than for the U.S. population overall; for the elderly (ages 65 and over), the sex ratio stood at 84 compared to 72 for all Americans.

In 2006, almost two out of three (64%) Arab Americans aged 21-59 were currently married (Table 2). This proportion, which has remained steady since 1990, has consistently been several percentage points above the average for all Americans (61% in 2006). For both sexes, the proportion currently married is significantly lower among U.S.-born Arab Americans than for those born overseas, in part a reflection of family reunification among immigrant admissions. Also for both sexes, the proportions of divorced Arab Americans are substantially higher for the native-born, though they are still lower for these groups than for all U.S. males and females. Native-born Arab American women are more likely to be divorced than are other Arab Americans, although this proportion (13%) is still somewhat lower than for all U.S. women. Plausibly, U.S.-born Arab American women are more willing and able than their foreign-born counterparts to be both in a more equal partnership and to end an unhappy marriage.

–Table 2: marital status–

Geographical distribution

Arab Americans are evenly distributed across all four major regions of the United States (Table 3). Relative to the total U.S. population, however, they are underrepresented in the South. When analyzed at a finer level of spatial aggregation, it is apparent that Arab Americans are disproportionately concentrated in relatively few states. There are also some ethnic enclaves identifiable that may suggest slow assimilation, although the numbers of Arab Americans in such communities are small in most cases.

–Table 3, spatial distribution–

Nearly one in two Arab Americans (47%) live in five states (California, Michigan, New York, Florida, and New Jersey) that contain 31% of the total U.S. population. In addition, over one in three (35%) Arab Americans live in three states (California, Michigan, New York). California has the largest Arab population, accounting for 17% of the total. Although this is slightly lower than in 1990 (19%), California still accounts for 23% of all Arab foreign-born. One in ten Arab Americans lives in Michigan where Arab

Americans constitute the largest share of a state's overall population (1.8%). There are particularly large Arab American communities in Sterling Heights and Dearborn, both part of greater Detroit.

Socio-economic characteristics:

Educational status and English language ability

Findings from the 1980 and 1990 censuses showed that Arab Americans had high levels of educational attainment relative to all Americans (Kulczycki and Lobo, 2001). This pattern has been reinforced over time, with Arab American women making especially striking progress. In 2006, 40% of all Arab American adults aged 21-59 possessed a college or professional degree, compared to just 28% of all Americans (Table 4). Native-born Arab American women have achieved considerably higher educational attainment levels than the general population and have registered the most significant gains in terms of college graduates. In 2006, 45% of native-born Arab American women had earned a college or professional degree, compared to 42% of their male counterparts, and representing a steep increase from 35% of such women in 1990. In contrast, only 34% of foreign-born Arab women had earned such credentials, although this is still higher than for all American women (29%). These relatively high levels of educational attainment bode well for the ability of Arab Americans to move into higher paying occupations which, in turn, enhances their prospects for successful social and economic integration.

In addition, a higher proportion of US-born Arab American women now complete high school or some college than before. In short, U.S.-born Arab women have not only achieved parity with their male peers but now even outscore them, and they have achieved significantly higher levels of educational attainment than the general population. Although foreign-born Arab American women also fare better than in earlier decades, the proportion of such women who had less than a high-school education (18%) was higher than that among all American women (12%) and is higher than for their male counterparts (14%). Nevertheless, the situation has continued to improve since 1990, when one in four (25%) immigrant Arab women had not completed high school education.

Table 4: educational attainment

In 2006, the proportion of Arab Americans who spoke a language other than English at home (60%) was nearly three times that of all Americans (21%). Close to nine in ten immigrant Arabs reported they spoke a language other than English at home, compared with 29% of U.S.-born Arab Americans. Overall, despite its high share of non-English speakers, the Arab American population has high levels of English-language proficiency. In 2006, 77% of all Arab Americans and 96% of the U.S.-born reported a strong command of English, compared to 90% of all Americans. Among immigrant Arabs, 61% reported strong English-language skills.

This indicates a high proportion of English-language proficiency among immigrant Arabs, even though 88% continue to speak a language other than English at home,

usually Arabic. Second, it implies that although most immigrant Arabs have good prospects of adapting to the U.S. labor market, a sizeable fraction may have difficulty in communicating in English. In addition, it suggests an ability to retain ethnic distinctiveness. Most Arab Americans want to preserve the important parts of their native cultures at the same time as they want to partake in U.S. society. Thus, most members of the second generation are managing to keep Arabic as a common bond with their heritage while simultaneously developing a strong command of English.

Household characteristics

The traditional Arab focus on the family is borne out in the types of households in which Arab Americans live. These are more likely to be composed of two-parent families than the average American household. They are also less likely to be headed by a single-parent with no spouse present, or to consist of persons living alone or sharing with non-relatives only ('non-family households').

Living arrangements for Arab Americans have remained more stable over time than for all Americans. In 2006, 55% of Arab American households were maintained by married couples (Table 5), four percentage points lower than in 1990. This compared to 50% of all U.S. households, down from 55% in 1990. These findings are significant, because married-couple families tend to have the highest incomes. Thus, a relatively high percentage share of such households carries positive implications for the economic standing of Arab Americans.

– Table 5 (household structure/characteristics) here –

Arab Americans have a lower share (30%) of non-family households than do all Americans (33%), but there is wide variation by nativity. U.S.-born Arab Americans were more likely to live in such households (38%) than were their immigrant counterparts (26%). The proportion of female-headed, Arab American households with no husband present (9%) increased by nearly two percentage points since 2000, but was still significantly lower than for the general population (13%). A growing percentage of single-parent families means that fewer children have the benefit of living with both parents, a trend that may have negative implications for children's educational attainment.

The average number of people per Arab American household rose from 2.6 to 2.9 persons over 1990-2006, due to an increase in the average household size of immigrant Arabs (from 2.9 to 3.2 persons over the period). The average household size for native-born Arab Americans fell slightly alongside that for all Americans (2.5 persons, down from 2.6 in 1990). This may indicate the preferential economic position of most U.S.-born Arab Americans. The proportion of owner-occupied households headed by U.S.-born Arab Americans (69%) was higher than the national rate (67%) and significantly higher than for foreign-born Arab Americans (51%). In all, 58% of Arab American households owned their own homes, up from 56% in 1990. Arab American children were more likely to live in the supporting environment of a two-parent family household; 81% of them lived with both parents, compared to only 72% of all American children.

Economic well-being

In 2006, Arab Americans had a median household income of \$50,000, 6% higher than the U.S. national average (Table 6). Native-born Arab Americans fared much better (\$56,700). The median household income for immigrant Arabs (\$45,000) was 5% lower than for all Americans, whereas in 1990, it was marginally higher. Poverty rates take into account both household income and household size. They provide more sensitive measures of economic distress, because they are based on income thresholds that vary by size of family and number of children. The poverty rate for Arab Americans (17%) was higher than for the general U.S. population (12%) and has risen from 15% in 2000. For immigrant Arabs, the poverty rate (20%) was six percentage points higher than among U.S.-born Arab Americans. Poverty rates are typically elevated among immigrant groups, especially among recent immigrants.

Table 6, household income, poverty and earnings

Prior research showed that employment rates were lower for Arab American women than for all American women, and that for their male counterparts, they were roughly equivalent to all American men (Kulczycki and Lobo, 2001; Read, 2004). Similar patterns prevailed in 2006 among adults in the prime working age-groups. Compared to all American men, labor force participation rates were almost as high for immigrant Arab men, and for U.S.-born Arab American men, they were nearly five percentage points higher (Table 7). Native-born Arab American men and women were more likely to be working than immigrant Arabs, as they tended to be better educated and more familiar with the domestic labor market. Foreign-born women were the least likely to be working, with every second such woman not in the labor force. This may reflect gender traditionalism and, in some cases, husbands' high earnings. However, the reported labor force participation rate of immigrant Arab women increased from a low of 44% in 2000, whereas it fell by two percentage points for immigrant Arab men in the most recent period.

--Table 7 about here--

Most Arab Americans (71%) are private wage and salary workers, as is true for the general U.S. population (74%). Arab American women are more likely to be salaried workers than their male counterparts, who are disproportionately likely to be self-employed. Many foreign-born groups have higher levels of entrepreneurship, but the rate appears to be particularly high for Arab American men (20% overall and 21% for those born overseas) compared to all American men (12%). Compared to the general U.S. population, Arab Americans were much less likely to be government workers, although the differences fade for the native-born, especially among women. Arab Americans are also less likely to be government workers, although the differences fade for the native-born.

Among adults aged 21-59 who were in the labor force, Arab Americans were prominent in managerial, professional, and related positions. Moreover, their concentration in these

occupational categories has become more marked over time. By 2006, every second US-born Arab American woman in the labor force was represented in a managerial or professional occupation, a steep increase from just 32% in 1980. Among men, 43% of native-born Arabs and 35% of immigrant Arabs were in such high-end occupations, compared to 30% of all U.S. men. The high proportions of Arab American workers in these occupations are correlated with their relatively high levels of educational attainment. Immigrant Arab women in the labor force have had about equal representation in such occupations as all American women throughout the period considered, reflecting the high share of college graduates among immigrant Arabs.

About one in four Arab American men were working in sales and office occupations, compared to one in six of all American males. The percentages of Arab American women employed in these occupations were higher; they were also very similar by nativity group and to all American women. Arab American groups were underrepresented in service occupations, except for immigrant women. In addition, relatively few Arab Americans were engaged in other occupations (construction, extraction, maintenance, production, transportation, material moving, farming, forestry or fishing).

– Table 8 (occupational status) –

Mean earnings for all Arab American groups considered significantly surpass U.S. national averages (Table 6). In 2006, U.S.-born Arab American men aged 21-59 had by far the largest mean earnings (\$77,371), a function of their higher educational attainment and representation in professional occupations. Foreign-born Arab men earned less on average (\$63,498), but still 12% more than the average American male. Evidently, their relatively strong levels of educational attainment are not yet translated to higher earnings. This may be due to the offsetting influences of weaker English-language proficiency, unfamiliar educational credentials to employers, and recency of arrival. Compared to all employed American women, U.S.-born Arab American women who were in the labor force commanded mean earnings that were 23% higher, but this premium fell to under 2% for foreign-born Arab American women .

Discussion

A common cultural and linguistic background, and to some extent a shared historical experience, makes Arab American immigrants and their descendants a distinct ethnic group. Nevertheless, most Americans are poorly informed about this group, conflating ‘Arabs’ with ‘Muslims’ and confusing physical or cultural characteristics gleaned from popular media stereotypes. Such misperceptions are perhaps inevitable given the lack of accurate, nationally representative information on the Arab American population, and on its social and economic adaptation. This analysis has sought to ameliorate such gaps in knowledge and scholarship by examining census data across a range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics for the Arab American population. To the best of our knowledge, this is also the first application of ACS data to assessing Arab American characteristics. While our primary focus has been on evidence from the newly available 2006 data, we have explored continuity and change over recent census decades and

sought to emphasize the significant changes that have taken place between 1980 and 2006. The findings also point the way forward toward a preliminary assessment of the continued social and economic adaptation of this population, and whether the predominant assimilationist path observed argues for or against a separate ethnic identity.

Arab Americans are a growing but increasingly diverse immigrant group. Arab immigration into the U.S. has continued apace, notwithstanding the events of 9/11, lending increased heterogeneity to this population. Despite their rapid growth however, Arab Americans still constitute a small ethnic minority. Arab Americans also continue to fare better than the national average with respect to their socio-economic position. Although we lack sufficient cases to examine inter-group differences among Arab Americans in detail, it is known that at the local level, there are marked socio-economic differences between Arab American communities (Abraham and Shyrock, 2000; Aswad 1984).

Notwithstanding the secular gains in educational attainment registered by the general U.S. population over 1980-2006, the improvements made by Arab Americans have surpassed those achieved by all Americans. Arab Americans are significantly more likely than the average American to have a college or professional degree. The progress made by U.S. born Arab American women is particularly striking and contradicts stereotypes of Arab women as passive and downtrodden. However, other research shows many Arab American women are caught in a tug of war, usually within the family, between traditional values and the social and sexual liberties permitted women in the West (Shakir 1997).

Arab American household structures are more likely to consist of married-couple family units, so that Arab American children are more likely to live in two-parent family households than are all American children. This accords with Arab socio-cultural customs and religious values (both Christian and Islamic), which emphasize traditional family structures and gender roles (Bilge and Aswad, 1996). Most Arab Americans are retaining their Arabic language ability, facilitating the maintenance of ethnic distinctiveness, without letting this impede their social and economic integration with the mainstream society. Nevertheless, some new Arab migrants struggle economically, resulting in a poverty rate significantly above that for all Americans or for US-born Arab Americans.

The high levels of educational attainment and strong English-language skills of Arab Americans bode well for their incorporation into the U.S. labor market and translates into higher median earnings. Arab Americans of both sexes, and even those born overseas, enjoyed higher mean earnings than did all Americans. However, the employment rates of Arab immigrant women are very low. This is almost certainly a function of traditional community norms that emphasize women's familial roles, as corroborated by other research (Read, 2003). Arab Americans continue to be more likely to hold managerial, professional, and related positions. Compared to U.S. adults overall, they have in fact strengthened their representation in such occupations, which also translate into higher incomes than the national average. Arab Americans often are entrepreneurs or self-

employed and are more likely to own a business. Conversely, they remain underrepresented in both skilled and unskilled blue-collar jobs.

Despite this progress, one effect of 9/11 has been a renewed questioning of Arab American identity and of the outward expression of ethnicity and religion. The unease generated has been compounded by heightened security and immigration measures, including warrantless searches legitimated by the 2001 U.S. Patriot Act. Consequently, it has been argued that Arab Americans, earlier marked as 'white,' have recently come to be seen as 'non-white,' in contrast to most immigrant communities that have made a transition from 'non-white' to 'white' or that have been consistently marked as 'non-white' (Jamal and Naber 2007). This assessment needs to be qualified, however, not least because the backlash to 9/11 from much of U.S. society was not as strong as many Arab Americans feared. It is still too early to tell if the attacks of 9/11 will have a long-lasting effect on Arab Americans and on their integration and assimilation into U.S. society. Although such prospects will remain influenced in part by U.S. government policies toward this group and the Arab world, Arab immigrant flows have continued apace since 9/11, regardless of government policies.

Moreover, a deeper historical perspective indicates that although Arab Americans are a predominantly white ethnic group, they have long occupied an ambiguous position as 'white.' In earlier times, Arab immigrants entered the U.S. when racism and nativism were pervasive, the Protestant establishment determined who and what was American, and 'Anglo-conformity' was required for citizenship. Arab Americans 'made it' through hard work, forsaking much of their cultural distinctiveness, adjusting and blending in. This trajectory may differ from that of Arabs and Muslims in Europe, who are seen as non-white and who are more strongly perceived as cultural outsiders.

In Europe, immigration from Arab and Islamic countries has sparked greater conflict than in the U.S. This was perhaps inevitable given the more recent experience of immigration into Europe and the poor backgrounds of most Muslim immigrants, who tend to be significantly less well educated than most Europeans. Also, the proximity of sending countries has reduced incentives to integration. This may also be inherently more difficult to achieve than in the U.S. as a result of Europe's deeper history and colonial relationships with many migrant sending countries, including those of the Middle East and South Asia. Indeed, how European countries deal with their minorities is a mounting concern for its publics and leaders, who recognize that immigrant integration is important for the well-being of their societies and economies, but who are much more vexed by questions of how such disparate cultures should accommodate each other.

A number of books have been published warning of an impending calamitous clash between Europeans with traditional Western values, undermined by the failure of European countries to provide jobs to immigrants and to contain Islamic radicalism through either appeasement or a failed multicultural project. Some of these books have been written by American writers (Bawer, 2006; Berlinski 2007; Phillips 2007). Reality is more complex, however. The European Union has today about 20 million Muslims, or

4% of its inhabitants, a figure which may increase to 30-40 million by 2025 and may be boosted further by Turkey's possible accession to the EU. Both economic and demographic factors such as the growth of trade, high unemployment in Arab countries, aging in Europe, make growing Arab migration to Europe a likely scenario (Fargues 2004). However, Muslims seem to have fewer babies the longer they have been in Europe (Westoff and Frejka, 2007). Policymakers have been divided between France's strict integrationist approach and the more tolerant multiculturalism of Britain and the Netherlands, none of which are now seen as successful. Europe's Muslims themselves are not homogenous and are divided by strong intergenerational divisions. Germany's Turks have little in common with Britain's mainly South Asian Muslims or France's North African migrants.

Many Western European cities contain a potentially volatile Muslim underclass which is poor, alienated, and linked by family ties to the most oppressed parts of the Muslim world. Although the USA may have, so far, succeeded better in absorbing its Muslims, this may also be because most Muslim Americans are either upwardly mobile migrants from southern Asia, Iran or the Middle East, or black American converts without direct links to Islam's heartland. However, Arab and Muslim Americans have suffered prevailing prejudices and are not allowed to express themselves as publicly as other groups, especially in the political arena. U.S. Muslims also reflect the religious and sectarian divisions of Arab countries (Haddad 2004).

As shown by this study, Arab Americans are diverse in terms of ancestral identities, dispersed throughout the U.S., generally well educated, earning good incomes, and working in managerial and other well paid jobs. This facilitates their integration, as does America's greater openness to immigrants and tolerance of religious diversity, and thereby to accommodating the participation of its new citizens. In Europe, the importance of deregulating labor markets and enabling newcomers to find work more easily may matter far more to integration than emotive debates about symbols such as scarves or cartoons. The future of Europe's Muslims lies with the young, but America's fabled melting pot may not be the best guide to integration. In the U.S., while Christians may still comprise a slight majority of all Arab Americans, they account for a declining share given the continued inflows of Arab Muslims. A hopeful sign may be the high rates of intermarriage and therefore of assimilation among native-born Arab Americans, about 75% of whom of either sex married non-Arab partners, according to an earlier analysis of 1990 census data (Kulczycki and Lobo, 2002).

Conclusions:

The demography and socio-economic adaptation of Arab Americans have received less scholarly attention than many other ethnic groups, although this population has been subjected to a great deal of press and popular attention in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. This study sheds new light on this group, portraying continuity and change along a number of demographic and socio-economic characteristics, as well as its assimilation trajectory. The Arab-descendent population in the U.S. has increased more than two-and-a-half times over 1980-2006, a function of more liberal U.S. immigration laws and continued political unrest in the Middle East. This segment of American

society tends to be younger, more educated, more affluent, more likely to hold sought-after jobs and to be self-employed as compared to the average American.

As a group, Arab Americans continue to fare well on many indicators of social and economic assimilation. This is in contrast to the situation of Arab and Muslim immigrants into Europe. Nevertheless, this upbeat assessment of the prospects for Arab Americans is tempered by several caveats. First, there exists a sizeable fraction of less-skilled immigrant Arabs, especially among women. Second, the heightened political sensitivity ascribed to this group following the events of 9/11 and the conflation of Arab Americans with images of suicidal jihadists in many people's minds renders continued progress toward social integration more problematic for all Arab Americans. To date, however, Arab Americans have entered and assimilated into the U.S. on an individual basis, and most have become a solid part of the middle class. In the process, they have added to the U.S. experience of successfully assimilating a wide variety of ethnicities and mass immigration streams.

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