Race & ethnic relations: *American and global perspectives*

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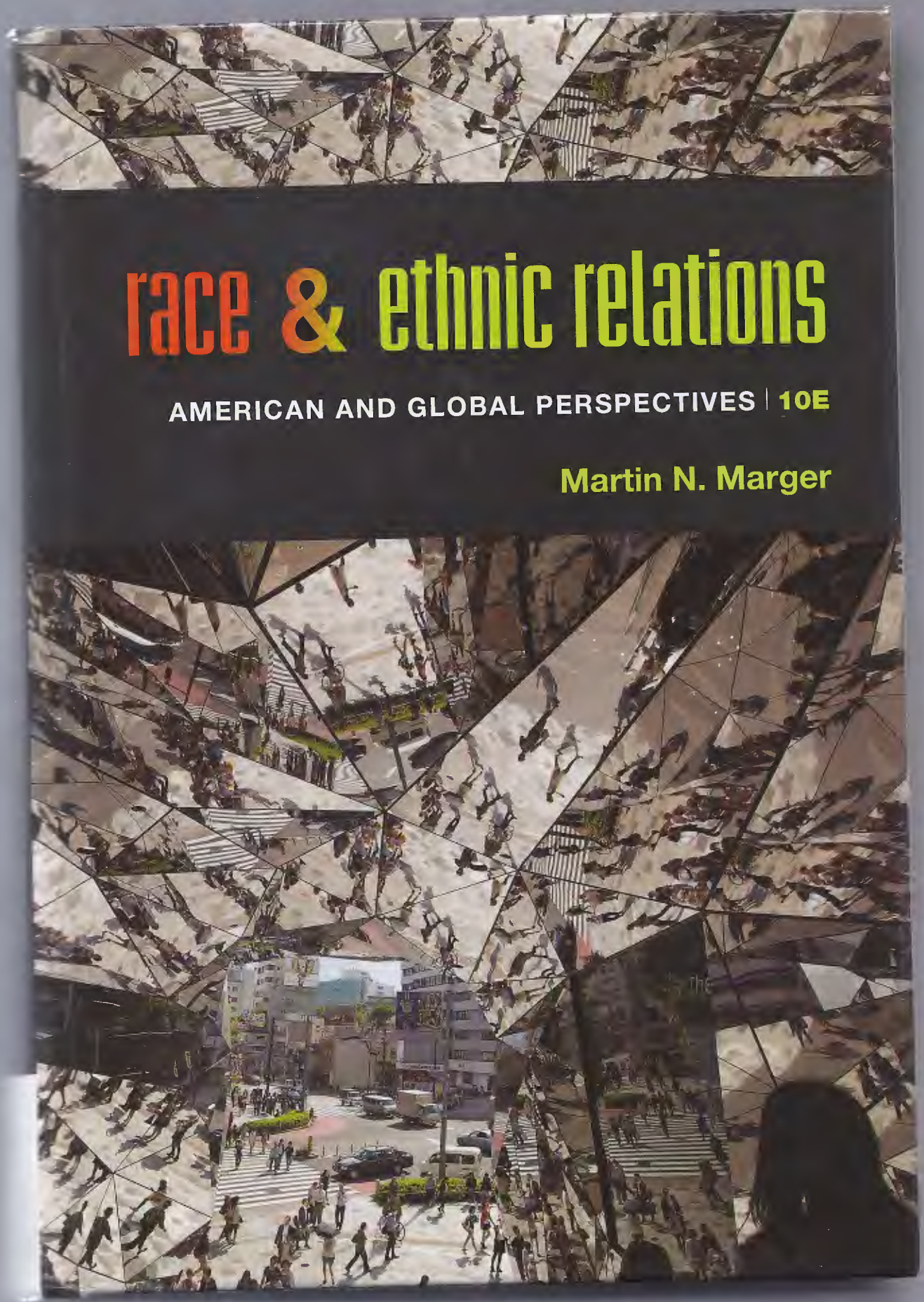
race & ethnic relations
AMERICAN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES | 10E
Martin N. Marger

Arab Americans

CHAPTER 12

Arabs are a population that is a key element of America's expanding ethnic diversity. Although they actually have a lengthy presence in American society, Arab Americans have become more numerous and more sharply visible only in the past several decades. They serve as an excellent case to demonstrate how the United States has accommodated new and, from a historical standpoint, culturally unprecedented groups during the contemporary period of immigration. They also illustrate well the issues related to adaptation and integration of ethnic groups, as well as to new forms of ethnic division and conflict.

ARABS, MUSLIMS, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

In the United States in recent decades, the terms *Arab, Muslim,* and *Middle East* are often conflated and used interchangeably. Because the media and other institutions do not apply these terms with precision, perceptions of people referred to as Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and Middle Easterners can be confusing and commonly lead to misconceptions. Let's briefly clarify these terms.

The Arab World

Arab countries are part of the region of the world referred to as the Middle East or, more precisely, the Middle East and North Africa. Not all countries of the Middle East, however, are Arab countries. Iran and, at times, Turkey are considered part of this world region, and both are among its largest and most populous countries; but neither is part of the Arab world. Although their populations are overwhelmingly Muslim, their languages and cultures are distinctly different from those of Arab countries, like Iraq and Egypt, which share more historical and ethnic similarities. Israel is also part of the Middle East. Although the Israeli population is about one-quarter Arab and much of its Jewish population descends from Arab countries, it is primarily a Jewish state that obviously does not exhibit political, linguistic, or religious similarities to other countries of the region. The Arab League, consisting of

twenty-two countries that share an Arabic culture and language, is usually understood to comprise the so-called Arab world. It is groups from those countries on which this chapter will focus.

Most of the inhabitants of Arab countries are Muslim—that is, followers of the religion of Islam. Thus, *Arab,* an ethnic or cultural designation, should not be confused with *Muslim*, a religious designation. Not all Arabs are Muslim. In fact, throughout history thriving Christian communities have been part of virtually every Arab country, though their numbers have dwindled in recent years. Significant Jewish communities also characterized countries of the Arab world until the 1960s.

Just as not all Arabs are Muslim, not all Muslims are Arab; in fact, most are not. Muslims (adherents of Islam) are found in all countries and together constitute the world's second largest religion. As seen in Figure 12.1, most of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims live not in the Middle East but in South and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. None of these countries is part of the Arab world. Muslims in Indonesia and Pakistan alone outnumber all those in Arab nations. Large Muslim populations are also found in Sub-Saharan Africa, in many countries of Western Europe, and in Russia.

Muslims in the United States

The number of Muslims in the United States can only be estimated, but all studies are in agreement that Islam represents a tiny proportion of the religious landscape, in no case more than 2 percent (Johnson, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2007b). Moreover, Arab Americans represent only about one-quarter of U.S. Muslims. Almost a third of American Muslims are African Americans (most of them converts to Islam), and more than a third are South Asians, mainly Indian and Pakistani Americans. The most recent immigrants from countries of the Middle East are mostly Muslim, but

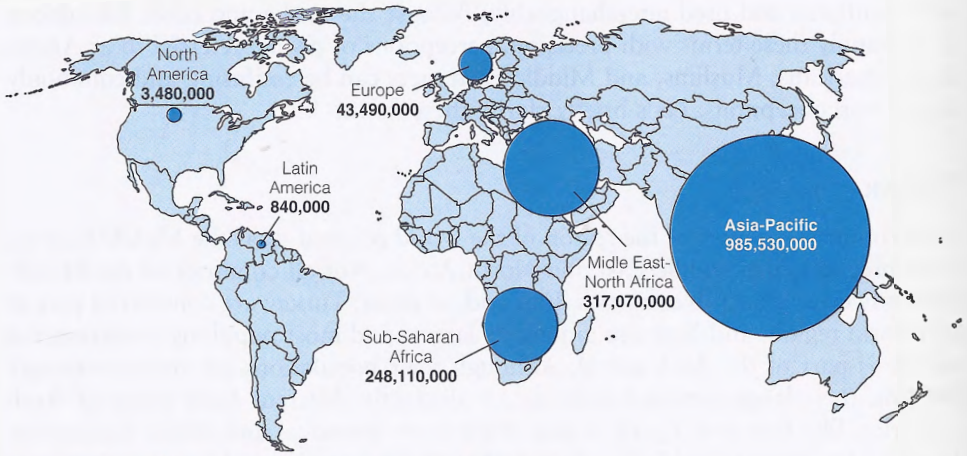

FIGURE 12.1 | WORLD DISTRIBUTION OF MUSLIMS

Source: Pew Research Center (2012b).

even among them, there are significant differences in belief and practice. Some are devoutly religious, whereas others are predominantly secular (Walbridge, 1999).

ARAB IMMIGRANT ORIGINS

The history of Arab immigration to America may be seen as occurring over three broad periods: those who came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a second wave in the years immediately following World War II, and the most recent wave, starting in the 1970s.

The First Wave

Arabs were a small part of the classic period of immigration in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries, described in Chapter 5 as the New Immigration. Most of these early Arab immigrants were Christian, and thus not different from southern and eastern Europeans, who made up the bulk of that immigrant wave. They were specifically from the Syrian region of the Ottoman Empire and were referred to (and identified themselves) as "Syrians" rather than "Arabs." After World War I, with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, Greater Syria became what today is a region of the Middle East consisting of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Israel, and parts of Turkey. A more common modern reference to these initial Arab immigrants is "Lebanese Americans."

It is important to consider that in this early period of Arab immigration, classifications of people from the Middle East were inconsistent and subject to frequent changes, including U.S. Census records. Moreover, religious differences were not noted. As a result it is difficult to delineate with any accuracy the Arab population during these years. Researchers suggest that perhaps 200,000 Arabs lived in the United States before 1940 (Naff, 1983; Orfalea, 2006).

The first wave of Arab immigrants was motivated primarily by the same socioeconomic factors as others of the New Immigration: the promise of economic opportunities. Most followed a path not unlike that of many Italian and other southern and eastern European immigrants of this period. They came with the assumption that immigration to America would be a sojourn—that is, a temporary stay. Following what they hoped would be economic success, they believed they would return to their homelands with the resources to buy land or open a business. Some did, in fact, return, but, like other immigrants, most stayed and established themselves in their new society.

Early Arab immigrants created an easily discernible occupational specialty. While some engaged in the silk trade, which they brought with them from Syria, the majority made their living peddling goods. As itinerant merchants, they radiated out to small towns in virtually every state, selling their items door-to-door. As such, they became a fixture of both rural and urban America. Alixa Naff describes the trade:

> Peddlers were mobile department stores, even when they peddled on foot as most did at first. With well-packed suitcases, frequently one in each hand and one on their back, they carried almost anything a housebound urban housewife or isolated farmwife would need or desire. There were ready-made school clothes, men's work clothes, yard goods, linens, toweling, costume jewelry, and much more. (Naff, 1994:29)

This economic niche eventually led to the establishment of small, family-run businesses as settlement in America gradually lost its sojourning character and became more permanent. One such business was begun in 1926 by a Lebanese immigrant, J. M. Hagger, whose company eventually developed into one of the largest and best-known manufacturers of men's clothing.

Most of these early Arab immigrants blended almost imperceptibly into the U.S. mainstream within a generation, moving into the middle class as entrepreneurs and professionals (Kayal and Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1983, 1994; Walbridge, 1999; Younis, 1995). Two factors seem to have worked in their favor in bringing about comparatively swift and uncomplicated assimilation. For one, except in a few urban areas, their numbers were small compared to other major groups of this immigration period. Second, and of greater importance, they were mostly Christian, practicing Eastern-rite faiths, including Maronite, Melkite (affiliates of the Roman Catholic Church), and Eastern Orthodox. A small number of Muslims, mostly unskilled workers, also entered during the early 1900s, bound for the Ford assembly lines in Detroit. They made up less than 10 percent of the first wave of Arab immigrants (Orfalea, 2006).[1]

The Second Wave

The most significant increase in the Arab American population in the modern period occurred beginning in the 1970s, but a second, smaller, wave of immigrants from Arab countries arrived in the United States starting in 1948, primarily as a result of the changed political boundaries and subsequent conflicts that arose in the Middle East. To better understand the origins and motivations of Arab immigrants during this and the subsequent period of immigration, we need to briefly review the modern political history of this world region.

World War I led to the fall and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which had dominated the Middle East for five centuries.[2] With the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918, Britain and France, victors in World War I, began to carve up this area of the world into spheres of influence, France in much of North Africa, as well as Lebanon and Syria; Britain in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and other smaller political entities. These were lands that were now occupied and dependent on British and French colonial regimes.

After World War II, these former colonies or dependencies won independence and began to create nationalistic movements. The result was a hardening of political and religious differences in the region. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 introduced a new dynamic that would subsequently affect not only countries of the Middle East but the United States as well. A significant Jewish population had lived in Palestine for many decades when it was governed as a British protectorate. A Zionist movement, given additional impetus by the Nazi Holocaust in Europe,

[1] Arabs during this time immigrated not only to the United States but also to Canada and several South American countries. As in the United States, they were primarily Christian and followed a similar pattern of adaptation and integration.

[2] Prior to the end of World War I and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, what is today referred to as the Middle East was generally described as "the Near East."

created a swell of Jewish immigrants after the war, leading to further political pressures to create an independent Jewish nation. In 1948, Israel declared its independence, which led to the first Arab-Israeli war. With the defeat of the Arabs, Palestinians living in areas annexed by the victorious Israelis now found themselves refugees, many of whom came to the United States and other countries.

Arabs in other countries, in addition to those from Palestine, were motivated to leave as a result of the political turbulence that now characterized the region. Most of these refugees or exiles were higher in socioeconomic status than Arab immigrants of the first wave had been on arrival, and they came with higher educational resources. Many were, in fact, students recruited from Middle Eastern countries to study at U.S. universities. The expectation was that they would return to their home countries with a pro-U.S. perspective that would enhance American interests in the region (Haddad, 2011). Many, however, ultimately settled in the United States. The most important characteristic that set this second wave apart from their earlier counterparts, however, was religion: a majority were Muslim, not Christian (Orfalea, 2006).

The Third Wave

As with other non-European groups, the end of restrictive immigration quotas in 1965 led to the entrance of a much more varied immigrant population, of which people from Arab and other Middle Eastern countries benefited. The series of wars and revolutions that continued to occur in the Middle East created political turmoil, which, in turn, prompted a steady stream of immigrants.

Arab immigrants of the past four decades have been more diverse in geographic origin, religion, gender, and social class than those of the first two waves, and for a number of reasons that we will further explore, their absorption into American society has been far more problematic.

Geographic Origins Third wave Arab immigrants have come from more than a dozen countries in the Middle East with the largest numbers from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories (Auclair and Batalova, 2013; Suleiman, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Some have been motivated to immigrate to the United States for reasons of economic betterment, but most, even those driven by economic factors, have been impelled in some degree to leave their home countries because of political unrest.

American political involvement in the Middle East has in itself been a catalyst for Arab immigration to the United States. U.S. involvement in the geopolitics of the region has stemmed from two factors: its unwavering support of Israel in the conflicts that ensued after 1948; and its dependence on oil reserves controlled by several Arab countries. U.S. political and military actions in conjunction with those interests have frequently contributed to the region's political instability, thereby creating the conditions for Arab emigration.

Religion Beginning with the second wave, religion became a key distinguishing characteristic of Arab immigrants from those of the first wave. This carried over into the third wave, in which the majority have been Muslim. It is also noteworthy that a

major source of Middle Eastern immigrants of recent decades has been Iran, following that country's revolution in 1979. Although not an Arab country, Iran is overwhelmingly Muslim and Iranian immigrants, though mostly secular, have therefore been an addition to the U.S. Muslim population (Bozorgmehr, 1997).

Although most who have immigrated in recent decades have been Muslim, many Christian Arabs, like Iraqi Chaldeans and Egyptian Copts, have also been part of the third wave. As seen in Figure 12.2, despite the fact that most new Arab immigrants to the United States are Muslim, a majority of the current Arab American population is still Christian, not Muslim, as is often assumed.

GENDER The third wave of Arab immigrants has included many more women than had typified earlier Arab immigration to America. Most immigrants of this period have come as family units, rather than as sojourning single men seeking economic opportunities.

SOCIAL CLASS Arab immigrants of recent decades have generally arrived in America with greater occupational skills and with higher educational qualifications than had typified immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, some have come with meager economic resources, particularly those who have fled political upheavals in their origin countries.

DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

Although the U.S. Census describes the Arab American population as 1.8 million, some researchers estimate that Americans with Arab origins may be at least double that number (Arab American Institute, 2012b; Kayyali, 2006a; Telhami, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). Because not all Middle Eastern Americans are Arab in origin, the total Middle Eastern population is also larger than the official count. In any

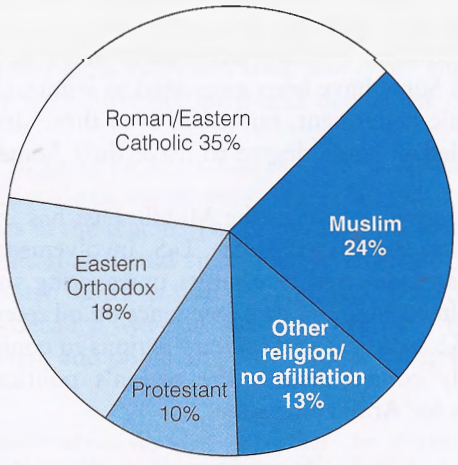

FIGURE 12.2 | RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS OF ARAB AMERICANS

Source: Arab American Institute (2002).

case, the Arab American population has grown enormously in the past few decades, having doubled since 1980, mostly as a result of immigration (Asi and Beaulieu, 2013).

As seen in Figure 12.3, the largest specific Arab American groups today are Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian. The first two groups are made up mostly of the descendants of those who came in the first wave, with little more than 20 percent foreign-born. For most of the other specific Arab groups—all primarily part of the third wave—more than half are foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a).

Arab Americans are almost entirely an urban population. Arab communities can be found in all regions of the United States, but their major concentrations are in a few large metropolitan areas, especially New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

THE DETROIT ARAB COMMUNITY The Detroit Arab American community bears closer examination since it represents the largest concentration of Arabs in the United States and one of the largest populations of Arabs outside the Middle East.

Immigration from the Middle East to the Detroit area has a lengthy heritage, with discernible Arab communities established as early as the last decade of the nineteenth century. Although most of the early immigrants were Syrian (today identified as Lebanese) and were Christian, there was a small contingent of Muslims among them. The majority of the Lebanese followed the traditional path of economic adaptation as peddlers who later established small businesses. The Muslims, far fewer in number, were attracted, like European immigrants of that time, by the promise of industrial jobs in the burgeoning auto industry. The first mosque in the United States was built in 1921 in Highland Park, an enclave within the city, not far from the plant of the Ford Motor Company where assembly line production was first implemented.

Today, Detroit is the principal destination of new Arab immigrants to the United States, having absorbed more newcomers in recent years than other American cities with significant Arab populations. Researchers have estimated the Detroit Arab population as around 220,000, but the actual number may be considerably higher

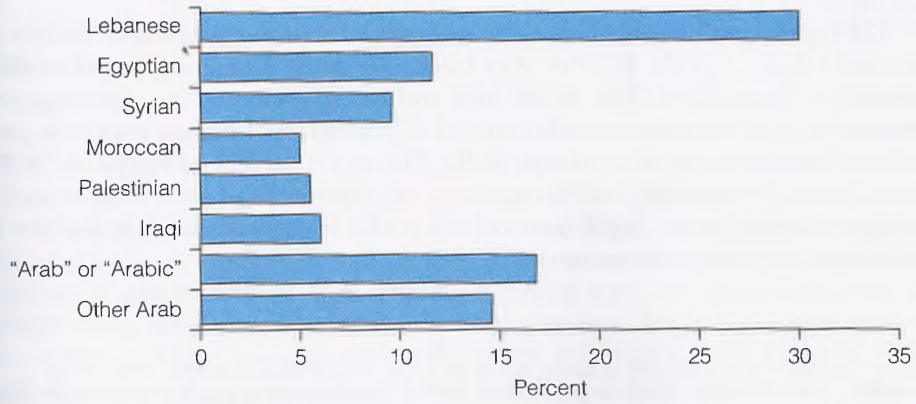

FIGURE 12.3 | ARAB AMERICAN POPULATION BY ANCESTRY

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2012a).

(Baker and Shryock, 2009; Schopmeyer, 2011). Though referred to collectively as the "Arab American community," in fact it is internally quite diverse in terms of national origin, religion, and social class.

The greatest concentration of Arabs in the metropolitan area is in the suburb of Dearborn, a city of about 100,000. Dearborn's past was shaped primarily by the Ford Motor Company, which established its major production facility there in the late 1920s and where its world headquarters remain. More than a third of Dearborn's population today is Arab American, most of whom are first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants, and at least 60 percent of the students in its schools are from Arab families. It is also the location of the Arab American National Museum, the only one of its kind in the United States. As large and as visible is the Dearborn Arab community, in fact the majority of Detroit's Arab population are scattered in other parts of the metropolitan area, in neighborhoods that cannot be characterized as ethnic enclaves (Baker and Shryock, 2009; Hassoun, 2005).

Today, Arab Detroit is represented by virtually every Middle Eastern country of origin and is almost evenly split between Christians and Muslims (Schopmeyer, 2011). The Lebanese community is the largest and longest resident. Most Lebanese are Christian, but third wave immigrants from Lebanon have been mostly Muslim. Iraqis are a second large group that is religiously mixed and whose members differ in geographical origin as well as time of immigration. Iraqis are divided by religion between Chaldeans—Iraqi Christians—and Muslims.[3] The Chaldeans have a longer history in the city and are generally higher in socioeconomic status than Iraqi Muslims, most of whom have arrived in recent decades. Palestinians, most of whom are Muslim, constitute the third largest component of the Detroit Arab population.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Like other ethnic populations, Arab Americans are represented in a broad range of social classes. This is seen in Tables 12.1 and 12.2. Some are poor and unskilled, but the majority are solidly part of the middle class. Many are highly educated professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and entrepreneurs—who are relatively well-off.

The higher status of the Lebanese is reflective of their much earlier settlement in the United States and the fact that they have assimilated economically and socially over several generations. Also at the high end of the socioeconomic spectrum are members of third wave groups who arrived with substantial human resources, particularly education and occupational skills. Almost 60 percent of Egyptians in the United States, for example, are foreign-born, but two-thirds of them hold at least a bachelor's degree (more than a quarter hold graduate degrees) and fully half are in professional or managerial occupations.

[3] Many Chaldeans do not identify as Arabs, but prefer to see themselves as a distinct ethnic group (Sengstock, 2005; Shryock, Abraham, and Howell, 2011b). Their native language is a modern-day dialect of ancient Aramaic, though most in fact speak Arabic. Their religion—Roman Catholicism—is the most evident cultural feature that distinguishes them from other groups of the Arab region. A sense of difference is driven also by the perception that Chaldeans were a group discriminated against in Iraq (Sengstock, 1983).

TABLE 12.1 | ARAB AMERICAN ECONOMIC ATTAINMENT

	Median Household Income	% Managerial or Professional Occupations	Percent in Poverty	% Unemployed
U.S. total	$50,502	36.0	15.9	10.3
Arab	51,363	43.7	22.8	6.9
Lebanese	65,264	48.5	13.7	5.4
Egyptian	61,571	52.1	18.3	7.8
Syrian	57,196	46.6	13.9	6.6
Moroccan	44,862	35.8	22.6	8.5
Palestinian	53,404	42.1	26.2	8.9
Iraqi	28,004	27.8	43.3	10.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2012a).

TABLE 12.2 | ARAB AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	High School Graduate (%)	College Graduate (%)	Graduate or Professional Degree (%)
U.S. total	85.9	28.5	10.6
Arab	88.3	45.5	18.1
Lebanese	92.3	46.4	19.5
Egyptian	96.1	66.6	25.8
Syrian	89.2	42.4	19.1
Moroccan	87.7	37.7	15.8
Palestinian	85.5	44.4	17.2
Iraqi	76.0	33.2	9.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2012a).

By contrast, at the other end of the socioeconomic scale are Iraqis, the median household income of whom is well below the national average. Moreover, their poverty rate is extraordinarily high. Three-quarters of Iraqis in the United States are foreign-born, reflecting their relatively recent arrival. Iraqis have fled repeated wars—the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, in which perhaps as many as one million were killed, as well as the U.S.-led Gulf War of 1993, and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq beginning in 2003. Another Arab group low in socioeconomic status are Yemenis, who are mostly young, single males, with fewer occupational skills and educational qualifications than other Arab groups.

Two of the largest groups of the recent immigrant wave have been Palestinians and Lebanese. Many of the former are professionals who found it difficult to practice their skills in the Israeli occupied territories. Most Lebanese of the third wave came with none of the sojourning motivations of the first wave Lebanese, but were pulled to the United States primarily by the disruption of Lebanese society as a result of wars in the region as well as a civil war within Lebanon itself.

While socioeconomic status is varied among the specific groups, when considered in total, Arab Americans exceed the general population on almost all measures. As seen in Tables 12.1 and 12.2, with the exception of Iraqis and Moroccans, median household income of Arab Americans is higher, the percentage of those in managerial and professional occupations is higher, and their rate of unemployment is lower. Only in the rate of poverty do Arab Americans generally exceed the national average; this is due primarily to the immigration in recent years of Yemenis and Iraqis with lower educational attainment and occupational skills. In education, Arab Americans have a higher percentage of high school graduates than the general population, a much higher percentage of college graduates, and a percentage of professional or graduate degrees that is nearly double that of the U.S. population as a whole.

Some of the more recent Arab immigrant groups have played a classic middleman role (discussed in Chapter 2) in their local economies, operating convenience stores, gas stations, and other small enterprises, often in areas underserved by large chain stores. In Detroit, for example, many Lebanese and Syrian Muslims have taken on this entrepreneurial role. Another, more conspicuous, middleman group in Detroit are Chaldeans, who thoroughly dominate the city's supermarkets. Chaldean grocery stores in Detroit date back as far as the early twentieth century, but in recent years they have filled what had become an economic vacuum, as major grocery chains almost completely abandoned the city in favor of suburban locations (Sengstock, 2005).

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Because Muslims predominate among the latest cohort of Arab Americans, they have, more than other immigrant groups and more than their early predecessors, run headlong into the dominant American culture. Islam is a religion that few Americans are familiar with, and they commonly harbor misconceptions about its tenets and rituals. In examining patterns of prejudice and discrimination against Arab Americans, it is important to keep in mind the failure of most Americans to distinguish "Arab" from "Muslim."

Stereotypes and Islamophobia

The activities of Arab terrorists in recent decades in the Middle East and elsewhere have brought to the fore a sinister image of Arab and other Middle Eastern groups, an image that was greatly exacerbated by the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the U.S. war on Iraq beginning in 2003. But the negative image of Arab Americans reaches back much further than simply the last few years. In fact, Arabs have been seen in the West generally as mysterious, violent, and villainous for centuries (Said, 1978). One of the only historical references to the Arab world that people

in Western countries are familiar with concerns the Crusades, in which invading Christian knights did battle with Muslims.

In some ways, negative images and anti-Arab prejudice in general resemble anti-Semitism (described in Chapter 11). Like anti-Semitism, an entire litany of historical myths and fabrications has been applied to Muslims, particularly those with origins in the Middle East. Some of the negative images associated with Arabs suggest classical themes familiar to all ethnic minorities, modified to fit present-day circumstances (Stockton, 1994). What has been referred to as **Islamophobia** consists of *the fear of and hostility toward Muslims, based on modern as well as historical images and events.*

The role of the media—especially films and television news—has been critical in presenting and sustaining anti-Arab stereotypes. In the 1980s, Jack Shaheen studied the portrayal of Arabs in television programming and concluded that negative stereotypes were virtually the only TV images of the group. The depiction of Arabs, he found, perpetuated four basic myths: "[T]hey are all fabulously wealthy, they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism" (Shaheen, 1984:4). A later study (Lind and Danowski, 1998) found little change in these images, except that no longer did the media portray Arabs as fabulously wealthy. Shaheen also studied almost all Hollywood films of the twentieth century that displayed Arab characters and concluded that, like television, the image of the Arab in movies had not changed in over a hundred years: "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women" (Shaheen, 2003:172).

Although, as we have seen, not all Arab Americans are Muslim, in the public view, the distinction between the two categories is dim. Adverse images of Muslims have been intensified in recent years in large measure by media portrayals that have been inextricably linked to a government-induced environment of fear, especially following the September 11 attacks and the second Iraq war. In a 2009 national survey, more than 40 percent of Americans openly admitted feeling prejudiced against Muslims (Gallup, 2009) and, whereas a minority believed that U.S. Muslims are sympathetic to the al Qaeda terrorist organization, fewer than half of Americans believed that Muslims are loyal to the United States. Given the tendency for respondents to give survey researchers what they feel are politically correct answers to questions regarding attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups, the actual percentage of those holding prejudicial views of Arab Americans is likely higher.

Other surveys have consistently shown the high level of mistrust and suspicion with which Arabs are generally viewed as part of American society. For example, 59 percent of Americans favor requiring Muslims to carry a special identification, and nearly the same percentage feel that Muslims should be more intensively searched at airports (Saad, 2006). Moreover, a substantial portion of the American public views Islam as more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its believers (Pew Research Center, 2009). It is important to consider that views of Arabs as potential terrorists and as religious fanatics had been commonly held by Americans well before the events of 9/11 (Jones, 2001). Whether Muslim or not, all Arab Americans have borne the effects of these highly negative and apprehensive views and attitudes; no other contemporary American ethnic group has been so intensely targeted.

GENDER STEREOTYPES One of the most controversial and misunderstood aspects of Arab and Muslim culture generally in the United States and other Western societies concerns the role of women. The Western image of Arab Muslim women is a combination of oppression and exoticism. Stereotypes of Arab women as, on the one hand, oppressed and slavishly obedient, and, on the other, as mysterious, alluring, and capable of abetting the evil schemes of their men, have lengthy historical roots, but have been especially pronounced in recent times as Muslims have become more conspicuous to Americans and others in the West. The stereotype of female subordination and oppression is especially palpable. Much of this view stems from media and other depictions of the plight of women in many Arab societies where they have few political rights, are not encouraged to enter the workforce, and remain strictly segregated from men in schools, mosques, and other social settings (Brooks, 1995; Haddad and Esposito, 1998).

By Western standards, the subordinate place of women in Arab societies has given rise to the assumption that these norms are similar throughout the Muslim world, though in fact most of them vary in scope from country to country. More important, this assumption is belied by the place of Arab and Muslim women in American society, where they are integrated into all aspects of social and economic life. In fact, Muslim American women are one of the most highly educated female religious groups in the United States, and Muslim Americans have the highest degree of economic gender parity at the high and low ends of the income spectrum (Gallup, 2009).

Perhaps nothing better symbolizes the contradictory stereotypes of oppression and exoticism than certain items of dress that Muslim women may choose. Many wear a head-scarf or veil (*hijab*), which immediately prompts attention and leads to assumptions about women's status. For Americans, this blends naturally into a more generalized perception of Arab and Islamic cultures as primitive and repressive, as opposed to the modern and freedom-enhancing culture of Western societies.[4]

Wearing the hijab has made Arab American women an easy target for harassment and discrimination at school, at work, and in other public places (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, 2009; Cainkar, 2009; Goodstein, 1997). British scholar Kate Zebiri suggests that the veil "provides a rich and endlessly versatile symbol, perhaps the most powerful symbol of Muslims' otherness and alien values" (2011:181).

The head scarf not only draws attention to Arab American women, but confirms for many their presumed subordinate status. As one researcher has described it, "To many, the veil symbolizes a patriarchal religious culture that universally oppresses Arab women" (Read, 2004:41). Many Americans assume that Muslim women are forced to wear the hijab, but its use is voluntary. In fact, many young Arab American women have chosen to wear it even if their mothers do not. Whereas many view the veil as a symbol of female subjugation, those who defend its wearing argue the very opposite. Islamic scholar Yvonne Haddad and her colleagues explain that women who wear easily identifiable Muslim garb do so as a matter of choice that affords them "freedom, liberation, relief, and even great joy" (2006:9). It has also been

[4] Although the subordination of women in most Islamic societies is alien to modern American and Western views of gender roles, it should be remembered that the "liberated" status of women in the United States and other Western societies is a relatively recent historical development. Moreover, Judeo-Christian theologies and practices have a centuries-old legacy of female subordination.

suggested that wearing the hijab enables women to straddle both American and Arab cultures (Haddad, 2007; Williams and Vashi, 2007).

A small minority of Muslim women in the United States and in Europe also wear the *niqab,* a veil that covers most of the face. This commonly leads to even greater suspicion and harassment of the few who wear it. Wearing the niqab has led to much debate, especially in Europe and even in Canada (Kingston, 2012). In France, for example, wearing the niqab in public was declared illegal in 2010, setting off a wave of controversy that has not yet played itself out.

Contemporary Islamophobia

Until the unfolding of political events in the Middle East during the past four decades, most Americans had had little cause to hold any images of Arabs, other than those presented in early films and literature. The Arab world and the Middle East in general were not part of the history and geography studies of schools at any level and the contributions of Arabs to science, mathematics, and literature were almost entirely neglected. Moreover, Arab American ethnic groups were tiny, with those of the first wave of immigrants blending unobtrusively into the American mainstream. Combined with historically well-founded stereotypes, episodes of terrorism starting in the 1970s, led by Muslim extremists, contributed to the widespread, almost institutionalized, Islamophobia that has characterized American society (and most European societies as well) since then. As the United States launched its so-called "war on international terrorism," a more precisely defined image of the enemy emerged: *Arab* (or *Muslim*) terrorists.

Political Links to U.S. Islamophobia Two events of the 1970s seemed to mark the onset of virulent anti-Arab images and the growing definition of Muslims as "the enemy." In 1973, the OPEC nations, most of which were in the Middle East, declared an embargo on the shipment of oil to the United States, in response to American support of Israel in the Arab-Israeli War of that year. This created an economic crisis and sharpened the focus of U.S. foreign policy on the Middle East. A second benchmark incident occurred in 1979 when a group of Iranian students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held sixty-six Americans hostage for fourteen months.

In 1985, anti-Arab hostility and fear once again intensified. In that year, a TWA airliner was hijacked by Lebanese Shiite gunmen, leading to a frenzied response by the media during the seventeen days in which the drama unfolded (Abraham, 1994). A photograph of one of the hijackers holding a gun to the head of the airliner's pilot was flashed in national magazines and newspapers, helping to trigger threats and violence against Arab Americans. A second incident of that year involved the hijacking by Palestine Liberation Front militants of an Italian cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro,* off the coast of Egypt. Since many of the passengers were American tourists, the incident became a U.S. issue, with President Reagan directing the U.S. Navy to prepare for a rescue attempt. Negotiations with the hijackers brought the incident to an end, but not before an American citizen had been shot by the hijackers and his body thrown into the sea. Like the TWA hijacking, this incident was given enormous coverage by the media. With each incident, the Arab/Muslim target of the "war on terror" became clearer for Americans.

Politically induced fear and suspicion of Arabs were stoked again in the early 1990s. The Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait in 1991 was responded to by an American-led coalition that liberated Kuwait in little more than two months. This has become known as the "First Gulf War," distinct from the later war that the United States would wage on Iraq beginning in 2003. Another highly dramatic incident occurred in 1993, when Muslim extremists attempted to bring down the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York by setting off a bomb in the parking garage of one of the buildings. Although the plot failed, six persons were killed in the attack and more than a thousand injured. Each of these events set off waves of verbal and physical attacks on Arab Americans and their institutions.

Americans' fears of terrorism seemed to reach near-hysterical proportions in the 1990s and Arabs had become the chief source of that public anxiety. Any terrorist activity was almost automatically associated with Muslims or Arabs. In 1995, a truck containing a two and a half ton bomb exploded in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, housing U.S. government offices as well as a day-care center. In the blast, 168 people were killed and 600 injured. It was the deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history prior to 9/11. In the immediate response to the bombing, the perpetrators were at once assumed to be Arab or Muslim terrorists. Before any of the facts of the event had been established, television and radio newscasters quickly spread this assumption. No more than hours after the explosion, the bomber and his associate were apprehended: they were white Christian Americans, motivated by antigovernment zealotry. Despite the fact that there were no Arab or Muslim connections to the bombing, in the days immediately following it, dozens of episodes of violence against Arab Americans were reported.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the level of suspicion and fear of Arabs and Muslims generally was raised to even greater heights, and media images were almost entirely negative, focusing on the radical actions of Muslim terrorists (Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007). The fact that the vast majority of Arab Americans had no sympathy for the terrorists or the beliefs that motivated them was lost in the ensuing public frenzy.

THE PERCEPTION OF ISLAM AS A "CULTURAL THREAT" Muslim Americans (and by inference, Arab Americans) have come to be seen by many not only as a security threat but as a cultural threat as well. Those who subscribe to this view see Islam as basically incompatible with Western values and its adherents intent on imposing Islam on other societies. One prominent political scientist referred to the meeting of Islam and the West as a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 2004). Such views encourage Arab and Muslim stereotypes of disloyalty, intolerance, and militance and generate the perception of a culture that is hopelessly incapable of ever being woven into the American social fabric.

Prejudice against Muslim Americans, particularly those from Arab countries, has spawned what some have called an Islamophobia network, made up of anti-Muslim bloggers, political pundits, and well-funded organizations that portray America as under attack by Islamic cultural and political forces (Ali et al., 2011; Elliott, 2011; Steinback, 2011). For example, Shariah, a Muslim religious code, is characterized as threatening to U.S. constitutional law, a baseless belief that nonetheless, through organized efforts, has led several states to enact "anti-Shariah" statutes.

In Oklahoma in 2010, for example, voters by a huge majority approved a ballot measure that forbade Shariah law in Oklahoma courts (Jones, 2013). The measure's supporters referred to it as the "Save Our State" amendment and portrayed Shariah as the first step toward the demise of the dominant (American) culture in the state—where Muslims number 20,000 in a population of 3.8 million. In the anti-Muslim fervor, the fact that the U.S. Constitution, as well as Oklahoma law, would have made such a development impossible was ignored. Similar measures have been proposed in other states and communities.

Such organized anti-Islam projects have been successful in perpetuating the negative image of U.S. Muslims and irrational fears of an Islamic cultural threat. A national survey in 2010, for example, revealed that more than one-third of Americans view Islam as "more likely than others to encourage violence." Negative opinions about Islam had actually increased from a similar survey five years earlier. Only 30 percent of Americans said they have a favorable opinion of Islam while more than 38 percent had an unfavorable view (Pew Research Center, 2010c). In another 2010 national poll, nearly one-third of Americans said that Muslims should be barred from running for president, and 28 percent believed that they should not be eligible to sit on the Supreme Court (Altman, 2010). A 2011 survey revealed that almost two-thirds of voters expressed discomfort with the thought of a Muslim being elected U.S. president, almost the same percentage as those who felt uncomfortable with an atheist president (Jones and Cox, 2011).

At the same time that a significant percentage of Americans voice distrust and/or fear of Muslims (again, it is important to keep in mind the common equation among Americans of "Muslim" and "Arab"), a majority admit to having little or no knowledge of the Islamic religion, either its principles or practices. In the 2010 Pew survey cited above, 55 percent said they know "not very much" or "nothing at all" about the religion. This lack of understanding of Islam has provided a fertile breeding ground for anti-Muslim and anti-Arab beliefs and actions. Most Americans would not mistake terrorism by Christian extremists—acts of violence against abortion providers, for example—as reflective of the beliefs and values of Christianity as a whole; such actions and their perpetrators are commonly seen as exceptional. This, however, is not the case in regard to Islam. At the same time that most Americans claim to know little or nothing about Islam, polling data indicate that they see it nonetheless as a religion very different from their own. Moreover, almost half believe that Islam does not teach tolerance of other religions (Panagopoulos, 2006).

As we have seen in previous chapters, once firmly established, ethnic stereotypes are difficult to eradicate and may perpetuate beliefs about ethnic groups for generations. These beliefs, in turn, help to shape ethnic identities that may continue to brand groups even after they have been well-assimilated into the larger society. Consider for example, the persistence of the organized crime-connection stereotype of Italian Americans, discussed in Chapter 10, or the tenacity of anti-Semitism, discussed in Chapter 11.

Discrimination

Anti-Muslim (and, by implication, anti-Arab) stereotypes and attitudes have become so deeply embedded in contemporary American society that even non-Muslim

Americans acknowledge the fact that Muslims in the United States face far greater discrimination than those of other ethnic minorities (Pew Research Center, 2009a). The forms and intensity of anti-Arab discrimination in recent decades cover a broad spectrum at the individual as well as institutional levels. Actions range from verbal abuse to physical attacks to official government policies.

INDIVIDUAL DISCRIMINATION At the individual level, acts of discrimination against Arab Americans become particularly widespread following any terrorist incident with Arab or Muslim connections or in the aftermath of Middle Eastern affairs that negatively affect U.S. interests. Immediately following the attacks of 9/11, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim incidents increased many-fold, but seemed to recede as the response to that event moderated (Disha et al., 2011). Nonetheless, Arab Americans during the past decade have encountered repeated acts of discrimination from employers, neighbors, and local police (Bebow, 2003; Cainkar, 2009; Krupa and Bebow, 2003; Schanzer, 2010). Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotypes continue to inspire attacks against mosques, vandalism against Arab-owned businesses and homes, verbal harassment, and even physical assaults (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013).

Attempts by Islamic groups in the United States to build mosques have commonly been contested by local governments and neighborhood residents. In 2012, the Pew Research Center documented 53 proposed mosques and Islamic centers whose construction had encountered community resistance in recent years. While most of the opposition cited concerns about traffic, noise, and property values, many opponents cited fears of Islam, Shariah law, and terrorism (Pew Research Center, 2012). In Florence, Kentucky, for example, the local Islamic center had proposed to move from a rented storefront to a much larger mosque in an area already zoned for religious use. Opponents set up a "stop the mosque" website and circulated fliers urging neighbors to help "stop the takeover of our country" by Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2012). In a more widely publicized case, residents of Murfreesboro, Tennessee in 2010 sought to halt construction of a new mosque and community center. They alleged in part that Islam is not a religion and that Muslims posed a threat to the neighborhood. In the two years following the beginning of construction, the site was subject repeatedly to vandalism, arson, and bomb threats.

Some hate crimes only threaten violence, but succeed in terrorizing their victims. Consider a case reported by the FBI in 2007 in which an Arab American woman, who managed a large hotel in Philadelphia, was the victim of a threatening note left by one of her employees telling her that "you and your kids will pay," and to "remember 9/11" (FBI, 2007).

All ethnic minority groups suffer from episodes of discrimination at the individual level but it is difficult to accurately gauge their extent since most such incidents go unreported to the FBI, which tracks hate crimes, or to other law enforcement agencies. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate crimes against all minority groups in the United States, estimated that anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2011 ranged between three thousand and five thousand. While most of these incidents are carried out by individuals or by small groups, at times they are promoted and financed by well-organized anti-Muslim organizations.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION In the wake of global events, Arab Americans for the past four decades have been stigmatized as potential terrorists and, therefore, as security risks. As a result, they have been the targets of government actions that in many cases have violated fundamental civil liberties and political rights. Rarely has a group been treated with the degree of suspicion and scrutiny as Arab Americans in recent times. Indeed, some have suggested that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim actions taken to this point are only a small step from internment similar to that suffered by Japanese Americans during World War II (Saito, 2010).

As early as 1972, the federal government began to collect data on immigrants from Arab countries and compile dossiers on Arab American leaders and organizations (Haddad, 2011). With the end of the Cold War in 1989, Islam seemed to replace communism as the "enemy," for which an entire array of official spying and surveillance devices were required. More sweeping government powers were enacted as the United States elevated its "war on terrorism," defined essentially as a war on *Arab* and/or *Muslim* terrorism.

The attacks of 9/11 brought security measures to new heights, including unprecedented restrictions on Arab Americans. The passage of the PATRIOT Act following the attacks removed many of the legal protections for Arabs living in the United States that are presumed to be constitutionally guaranteed. For example, it sanctioned monitoring without notification of telephone calls, emails, and credit card purchases of any individual deemed suspicious. Thousands of legal residents who were of Arab or Muslim origin were detained without charges (and many subsequently deported), simply on the basis of their Arab ethnicity (Saito, 2010). Federal cases against Arabs in the United States increased exponentially, though few proved to have any terrorist connections. Legal scholars have debated the constitutionality of the PATRIOT Act, though it has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court and has been reenacted several times by the U.S. Congress (German and Richardson, 2009; Hudson, 2011; Mac Donald, 2003).

Arab Americans have also been the repeated targets of ethnic profiling, in much the same manner as African Americans have been racially profiled. Particularly harsh scrutiny is given Arab Americans when traveling by air. In addition to stringent preflight screening, more severe discriminatory incidents are not uncommon. In 2006, for example, six Muslim religious leaders were taken off a US Airways flight in handcuffs after some passengers and crew members complained of what they deemed "suspicious" behavior. After being detained and questioned by federal agents for several hours, they were subsequently released. An almost identical incident occurred in 2009 when nine Muslim passengers (eight of whom were American-born citizens) were pulled off a domestic airliner and not allowed to rebook their flight even after the FBI had verified that they had done nothing wrong (Robbins, 2009). Such incidents have led to the caustically humorous reference to "flying while Muslim" (Davis, 2009). Some Arab Americans have found their treatment by airport security personnel so embarrassing and humiliating that they have simply discontinued air travel completely, choosing instead to drive great distances. As one Jordanian in Michigan asked, "What father wants their children to see them this way?" (Donnelly, 2003).

TOLERANCE OF ANTI-ARAB PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION As we have seen in previous chapters, incidents of prejudice and discrimination against virtually all racial and ethnic

minorities continue to occur with disturbing regularity in American society. But the social acceptance of those attitudes and actions has been widely condemned and they are seen for the most part as deviant. This is not the case regarding Arab Americans and Muslims. Many politicians, religious leaders, and political commentators routinely express Islamophobic views with impunity (Nimer, 2011). Clearly there is a level of tolerance of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination that no longer typifies the social response to such attitudes and actions aimed at other racial and ethnic groups.

Not only is anti-Arab and anti-Muslim rhetoric tolerated as it is for no other ethnic or religious group, but acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims in general no longer evoke the same degree of media attention and public concern as would ordinarily be expected. When a white supremacist murdered six worshippers in his attack on a Sikh temple near Milwaukee in 2012, it was assumed that the killer mistakenly believed Sikhs to be Muslims. Attacks on Sikhs[5] since 9/11 have, in fact, numbered in the hundreds since Sikh men wear turbans and beards. The Milwaukee killings garnered much national media coverage, in large measure because of the mistaken identity factor. As the journalist Samuel Freedman explained in the aftermath of the event, the mistaken-identity narrative suggested that public reaction might have been different if the attack had been on a mosque and Muslims had been the victims. "It suggests that such a crime would be more explicable, more easily rationalized, less worthy of moral outrage," wrote Freedman. Now that Muslims have been defined as "the enemy," he explained, "violence against them is understood in a mitigated, mediated way" (Freedman, 2012).

European Comparisons

Despite consistent and widespread prejudice and discrimination faced by Arab Americans, their plight has not been as turbulent and disruptive as that faced by Arabs and other Middle Eastern groups in Western Europe. After World War II, most Western European countries embarked on an economic rebuilding effort, requiring a labor force that could not be met with native workers alone. Hence, these countries began to recruit workers from former colonies or countries with a labor surplus.[6] Most of those who immigrated from the Middle East, including North Africa, were Muslim, making them highly visible among overwhelmingly Christian populations.

The presence of people radically different culturally has created a situation in which Muslim immigrants generally have been viewed as a social and political problem; this in turn has spurred anti-immigrant, often blatantly racist, views and actions (Benton and Nielsen, 2013; Diffy, 2004; Halász, 2012; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007). Right-wing political parties, whose major policy objectives have been to stanch further immigration of Muslims, have arisen in all Western European countries, and some have even proposed the expulsion of Muslims who have been living

[5] Sikhism is a religion founded in the sixteenth century in the Punjab province of India, and its principles and practices are essentially unrelated to Islam. Sikhs have been in the United States since the early nineteenth century and today number around 250,000.

[6] The creation of multiethnic societies in Europe as a result of post–World War II immigration will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 17.

in these countries for two or more generations. The socioeconomic conditions of Muslim ethnic groups are substandard and they remain marginalized in all areas of social and political life.

In worst cases, anti-Islamic movements have given rise to outbreaks of violence. In Germany, physical attacks against Turks, the country's largest immigrant population, have been commonplace for decades. In France, Muslims from North African countries, who compose fully half the immigrant population, have been the primary targets. Racially motivated incidents have occurred even in countries with fewer immigrants and solid traditions of tolerance, like Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands. In the latter, where most immigrants are from the Middle East or North Africa, anti-Islamic reactions reached a climax in 2004 when a Dutch filmmaker was brutally murdered by a radical Islamist after he had produced a film critical of the Muslim treatment of women (Buruma, 2005; Saunders, 2004).

ASSIMILATION—OR ALWAYS "THE OTHER"?

Will Arab Americans follow a path toward assimilation, or will they continually be seen as "the other," a kind of outlier group in the American ethnic system? In spite of the unique problems faced by Arab Americans in the current social and political atmosphere, there are small but unmistakable indications that this is an ethnic group that, like others before them, is being slowly integrated into the larger society.

Generational, Religious, and Class Divides

In considering the alternative paths of adaptation and integration on which Arab Americans may advance in the future, we need to reconsider the generational, religious, and social class diversity of this ethnic group, discussed earlier.

Assimilation and the Early Arab Americans Recall that Arab communities had formed in the United States as early as the nineteenth century. Arab Americans whose families derive from that period of immigration have been in the United States for several generations and have followed a passage of assimilation, both culturally and structurally, indistinguishable in most ways from those of southern and eastern European ethnic groups. As explained earlier, as Christians, most who immigrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries passed almost unnoticed into mainstream America.

The Lebanese Maronite (Roman Catholic) community illustrates an element of the Arab American population that has followed an almost classic passage of assimilation. Second- and third-generation families have moved into professional and managerial occupations and Arabic surnames are no longer common. Language assimilation, too, is very evident, with Arabic no longer understood by many beyond the second generation (Ahdab-Yehia, 1983). Unless it was pointed out, few would know that such luminaries of American society as consumer advocate Ralph Nader, or actress Marlo Thomas, or famed heart surgeon Michael DeBakey, or former football star Doug Flutie, are descendants of that early generation of Arab Americans. Moreover, first wave Arab Americans have been fully assimilated into the American political system, with several having served in the cabinets and executive offices of recent presidential administrations and in the U.S. Congress.

The Recent Generations of Arab Americans

Current Arab Americans strike a dramatic contrast with their earlier counterparts. Indeed, those differences cannot be understated. As Christians, most of the first wave Arab immigrants did not face the more daunting difficulties of more recently arrived Arab Americans, the majority of whom are Muslim. Moreover, their presence in American society was not fraught with highly charged political overtones, as is the case today. Arab Americans who have immigrated in the past several decades, along with their children, are highly visible and have arrived in an entirely different historical context from those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To expect that the new Arab communities will duplicate first wave Arabs in the absorption process, therefore, is not realistic. They will face considerably more formidable obstacles.

Although it is too early to draw firm conclusions regarding where the new Arabs will fit into the American ethnic system, evidence suggests that they are on an assimilation trajectory, though one that is tortuous and subject to numerous social and political variables.

Cultural and Structural Assimilation

Cultural Assimilation

On a number of dimensions of social and economic life, first-generation Arab American immigrants and their children appear to be moving toward cultural assimilation. Consider, for example, language. On this, Arab Americans rank high in comparison to other groups with a high percentage of foreign-born. In their study of the Detroit Arab American population, which contains a large number of first-generation immigrants, researchers found that 80 percent speak English well or very well. Moreover, most are bilingual and receive their news and information from both English and Arabic sources (Baker et al., 2004).

Another indication of cultural assimilation among Arab Americans is the large percentage who are becoming American citizens at a rapid rate (Schopmeyer, 2011). In fact, immigrants from the Middle East are much more likely than other immigrant groups to be naturalized U.S. citizens. Among the foreign-born from the Middle East, 59 percent are naturalized citizens, compared to 43 percent among the overall foreign-born population (Terrazas, 2011).

Structural Assimilation

Regarding residence and intermarriage, both key indicators of structural assimilation, Arab Americans may be following a path not unlike that of older, more established ethnic groups. One study (Kulczycki and Lobo, 2002), for example, reported a surprisingly high rate of intermarriage among Arab Americans. Over 80 percent of U.S.-born Arabs, the researchers found, had non-Arab spouses. Another study, examining residential patterns among Arab Americans, concluded that they are "less segregated and have greater access to quality neighborhoods than either Hispanics or Black Americans" (Holsinger, 2009:174).

Increasing structural assimilation, as indicated by intermarriage and residential dispersion, may be closely linked to socioeconomic status. The fact that Arab Americans generally rank higher than other ethnic groups in income, occupation, and education provides them with human and capital resources that other groups with large numbers of first- and second-generation immigrants may lack. The relatively high occupational and educational status of many among the newest Arab

immigrants will likely enhance the prospects for more rapid structural assimilation, both primary and secondary. Another factor that may increase the pace and scope of structural assimilation is racial status: Arab Americans are, at least officially, white. This factor is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Finally, it is significant that less than half of U.S. Muslims say that all or most of their close friends are Muslim. This contrasts sharply with Muslims in other countries, who report that all or most of their friends are Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2011a). Not all U.S. Muslims are Arab, of course, but it is reasonable to assume that Arab American Muslims are not exceptions to this trend.

Conflicting and Converging Values At the individual level, a kind of assimilation can be seen occurring that may at times manifest itself in a unique blending of Arab and American cultures. As a variant of segmented assimilation (discussed in Chapter 4), families may seek to advance economically and socially while preserving ethnic values. This may be particularly challenging for Arab Americans who practice Islam, who often find themselves in a cultural bind, given the requirements and expectations of their religion. For example, devout Muslims are expected to pray five times daily at prescribed times. This may present awkward or conflicting obligations of work or school, where ritual cleansing before prayer, in addition to space, may not be convenient or even permissible. Muslim dietary laws also present challenges to Muslim Americans who must consume halal meat, ritually slaughtered, and are forbidden to consume pork or alcohol. Increasingly, however, Arab American Muslims have been able to accommodate aspects of American life and culture with Islamic traditions and practices.

Consider the odd convergence of football, that most American of sports, with Islam, demonstrated by a Dearborn, Michigan high school. The overwhelming majority of students at Dearborn's Fordson High School are Muslim, not surprising when one considers that, as was noted earlier, almost two-thirds of students attending Dearborn's public schools are Arab American. When in 2011 football practices coincided with Ramadan, the Islamic holy month in which Muslims refrain from eating or drinking during daylight hours, the coach moved the practices to late night, after the fast could be broken and players would have eaten. Thus, they could remain loyal to their faith at the same time they were pursuing typical American goals. The school's principal, himself Arab American, put it this way: "Dearborn is no different from any little big city in the United States. Kids have the same dreams and ambitions as any other kids. They want an education and a lot of them want to play football" (Longman, 2011). Here, then, is an illustration of how seemingly incompatible cultures may intersect and continue to function in a uniquely multicultural fashion.

Opinions of Muslim Americans themselves give indications of a gradual, if uneven, path toward cultural and structural assimilation. An overwhelming majority express satisfaction with their lives in the United States and see their communities as good places to live. In the Detroit Arab American Study (Baker et al., 2004), Arabs and Chaldeans evinced higher levels of confidence in their local school systems, the police, and the U.S. legal system compared to the general population. Two-thirds thought that the quality of life for American Muslims is better than in most Muslim countries and more than 90 percent expressed pride in being

American. Moreover, as seen in Figure 12.4, a majority of U.S. Muslims believe that most Muslims who come to the United States want to adopt American culture; only 20 percent say that Muslims want to be distinct from the larger society.

Muslim Americans seem to be no less committed to basic American values than other ethnic groups. National surveys of Muslim Americans, a large proportion of whom were Arabs, have indicated that they "are decidedly American in their outlook, values and attitudes" (Pew Research Center, 2007b). A majority, for example, subscribe to the American work ethic and most are firm believers in American individualism. While 62 percent of the general public expresses a belief that "people can get ahead if they're willing to work hard," an even greater percentage of Muslim Americans hold that belief (Pew Research Center, 2011a).

Additional evidence of increasing assimilation is the evolving role of Islamic institutions in America. Like other groups that preceded them, Arab Muslims have created religious institutions that reflect American influences. In 2011, there were more than two thousand mosques and Islamic centers in the United States, nearly four times more than their number in 1986 (U.S. Mosque Study, 2011). In addition to its traditional religious functions, however, the mosque in America has taken on meaning and purpose that are somewhat unique in the Islamic world, having begun to reflect American cultural influences. The mosque has become more of a social gathering place for the community and a place in which celebrations (like weddings) take place. Also, rather than a primarily male activity, mosque attendance in the United States is more family oriented and women play a more active role (Gallup, 2009; Haddad, 2011). Similar transformations of traditional religious institutions

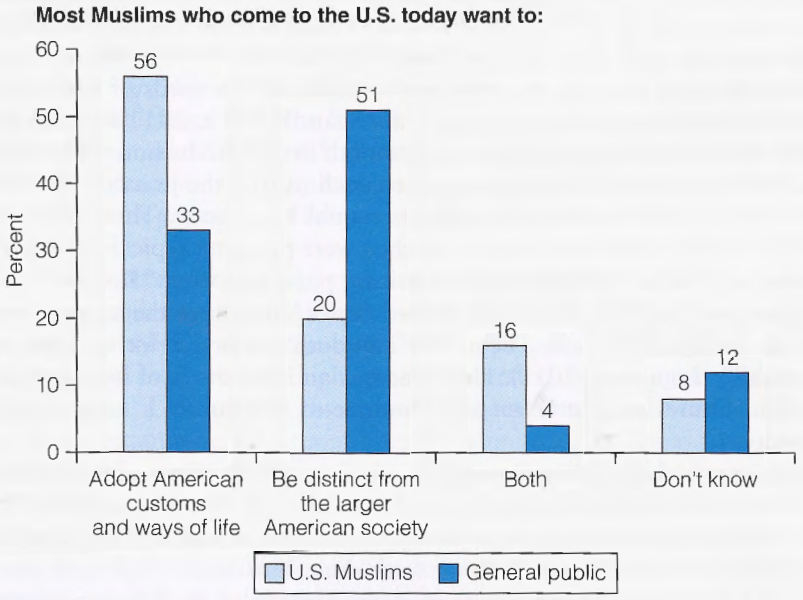

FIGURE 12.4 | ATTITUDES TOWARD ASSIMILATION

Source: Pew Research Center (2011a).

into more Americanized forms typified the experiences of earlier Catholic and Jewish ethnic groups.

ARAB WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT The growing prominence of Arab American women indicates an increasingly powerful thrust toward assimilation. The place of Arab women in the United States is markedly different from what it is in most Muslim societies, as well as in the large Muslim communities of Western Europe. Their wide-ranging expectations and accomplishments as well as their greater visibility contrast strongly with those of more traditional Islamic settings. A global survey showed that Muslim Americans are more supportive of the role of women in society than are Muslims elsewhere (Pew Research Center, 2011a). Almost all Muslim Americans agree that women should be able to work outside the home, and a majority also do not see any difference between men and women political leaders. These views deviate sharply from those in predominantly Muslim countries. As one Arab American woman executive has put it, "In many of our home countries, socially or politically it would've been harder for Muslim women to take a leadership role. It's actually quite empowering to be Muslim in America" (Knowlton, 2010).

The role and behavior of Arab and Muslim women in America should not be seen as uniformly consistent. On the contrary, there is a wide spectrum of belief, participation, and identity among them. Some choose traditional patterns of behavior, consistent with social roles they may have brought as immigrants from their origin societies. Others find ways of combining traditional ways of belief and identity with more Americanized patterns, and still others may reject entirely the traditions and practices of Islam. These are choices and decisions that continue to be debated in Arab and Muslim communities and by women themselves at the individual level.

DOMINANT GROUP CULTURAL EXCHANGES AND ADAPTATIONS As explained in earlier chapters, assimilation is not a one-way process, as cultural and structural exchanges and adaptations begin to take place between the dominant group and ethnic minorities. This has become apparent in areas with large and growing Arab American communities.

Companies and advertisers have come to realize this group's market potential and have begun to make outreach efforts. Consider that in the Detroit area, a McDonald's now serves halal Chicken McNuggets, Walgreens features Arabic-language signs in its aisles, and Ikea's women employees are given a company-branded head scarf to wear if they wish (Story, 2007). Public institutions also have begun to accommodate the Arab American community. To see advertisements and public notices posted in both English and Spanish is commonplace in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, but in Detroit, a third language—Arabic—has joined these two predominant languages in many institutions, like hospitals and banks.

Arab influences are increasingly evident in other spheres of U.S. culture. Middle Eastern fare such as falafel and shwarma, for example, are beginning to join the parade of ethnic foods that have become standard elements of American tastes. And, perhaps most unexpectedly, an Arab American Muslim was crowned Miss USA in 2010.

Although it is exceptional in size, the Detroit Arab American community may be seen as a case of emergent integration into the larger society. Arabs in the Detroit

metropolitan area have achieved a high level of political and social incorporation, and cultural exchanges with the larger community are very evident (Bebow, 2003; Ghosh, 2010; Howell and Jamal, 2008; MacFarquhar, 2007; Singer, 2001; Warikoo, 2001). Detroit Arab Americans have been recognized in the local media and in other public institutions as a significant ethnic population that is contributing economically, culturally, and even politically like other ethnic groups that preceded them. This is a development that contrasts sharply with views typically presented in the national media and commonly subscribed to by Americans that convey a problematic image of assimilation for Arab Americans.

Group Identity and Assimilation

A key factor in examining the assimilation process among Arabs is the way in which Americans identify this ethnic group and the way in which Arab Americans identify themselves in terms of race and ethnicity.

Racial and Religious Identity The racial/ethnic classification of Arab Americans remains uncertain and debated both within and outside the Arab American community (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, 2009; Naber, 2000; Samhan, 1999). For U.S. Census purposes, Arabs are "white," though a number of analysts have suggested that they are being racialized, that is, seen increasingly in racial terms as a separate, non-white, grouping (Cainkar, 2006; Tehranian, 2009).

Arab Americans themselves evince some uncertainty of their place within the American racial/ethnic system. Most self-identify as white, but differences do exist, especially along religious lines (Ajrouch and Jamal, 2007; Terrazas, 2011). Researchers in the Detroit Arab American Study (Baker et al., 2004), for example, found that nearly two-thirds self-identified as "white," while another third identified as "other." One study of Lebanese and Palestinian immigrant children demonstrated this ambivalent racial/ethnic status. Although officially they are white in the currently used racial/ethnic classification scheme, these adolescents distinguish themselves from the white majority. The study concluded that it is not clear if they will "permanently adopt a non-white identity or instead opt for inclusion in the dominant culture as they reach adulthood and have more contacts outside of the community" (Ajrouch, 2004:388).

What is equally uncertain is how the society at large will view Arab Americans as an ethnic or racial category. This may be a confounding factor in the long-term assimilation process. As one researcher has written, "Racial identity is an unfolding, ongoing, contextual, and socially constructed process for Arab Americans" (Cainkar, 2006:268). Even U.S. government agencies responsible for collecting racial and ethnic data have not agreed upon a clear definition of how Arabs and other Middle Easterners fit into the American racial/ethnic classification scheme (Brittingham and de la Cruz, 2005).

Panethnicity In the face of continued marginalization, Arab Americans may develop a stronger collective identity. In earlier periods of immigration, numerous European groups entered American society with a weak sense of ethnic identity that grew stronger not only as a result of census and other classification decisions, but of the

experiences of prejudice and discrimination. A panethnic identity among diverse Arab groups in the United States may be developing in the same way. In the Detroit Arab American Study, 70 percent said that the term "Arab American" describes them.[7]

Obstacles to Assimilation

What remains most challenging for a clearer Arab American assimilation path is the level of distrust and suspicion toward this group that continues to be expressed by many Americans (Arab American Institute, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2010c). Arab Americans must continually seek to prove their loyalty and that their values are compatible with those of the larger society. The events of 9/11 will linger in the minds of Americans for many decades, and those events and their aftermath are etched with images of Arabs and Muslims. Future terrorist actions in the United States or abroad will surely intensify those images, making the path to Arab American social incorporation fraught with complications.[8]

The anti-Islamic and anti-Arab rhetoric of recent years and the continued suspicion and lack of understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices continue to raise questions among the most recent generations of the Arab population of whether they will ever be fully accepted as Americans. This uncertain status is faced by *all* Arab Americans, whether Muslim or Christian, as the fear of Islam and the conflation in American minds of "Arab" and "Muslim" have overshadowed religious differences. For Arab immigrants and especially for their children—born and raised in the United States—the question is not whether they will be American, but rather what kind of American will they be, and what kind of American identity will the larger society impose on them?

Arab Americans are not the first ethnic minority to be viewed with widespread suspicion and mistrust as an outsider group. As explained in Chapters 5 and 10, Irish Catholics were the primary targets of American nativism in the nineteenth century, followed by Italian Catholics in the early twentieth. Catholicism, like Islam today, was seen by many Americans as a religion basically incompatible with American culture. Catholic bishops were viewed as agents of the Vatican, intent on undermining American society, and Catholics in general were viewed as violent, seditious, disloyal, and hopelessly incapable of ever integrating into the societal mainstream. As late as the mid-twentieth century, many still clung to the belief that Catholicism was an ideology of conquest, menacing to American democracy (Saunders, 2012).

Irish and Italian Catholics (and East European Jews as well) eventually took their place in the American mainstream and, in the process, fundamentally reconfigured the society's ethnic structure. Moreover, those groups took shape not in their origin societies, but in the context of American society, creating unique social and cultural forms. A similar long-term process may be occurring for Arab Americans, who today represent a challenging case that will once again test the absorptive capabilities of the American ethnic system.

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[7] It has been suggested that an Arab American identity had begun to develop much earlier as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War during which the United States supported Israel and media portrayals of Arabs were strongly negative (David, 2007).

[8] No other ethnic group in recent times has been so strongly impacted by events outside the United States. What happens in the Middle East affects the assimilation process, just as it affects patterns of immigration and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes.

SUMMARY

- Arab immigration to the United States occurred over three waves, extending from the late nineteenth century to the present. First wave immigrants were from the Syrian region of the Ottoman Empire and were mostly Christians. Second wave immigrants came after World War II mostly in response to political developments in the Middle East; most were Muslim. Third wave Arab immigrants, most of them Muslim, have come to the United States since the early 1970s, from virtually all countries of the Middle East.
- Arab Americans constitute about 1.8 million people, but some researchers suggest a much higher figure.
- In terms of socioeconomic status—income, occupation, and education—Arab Americans collectively rank higher than the general U.S. population.
- A lengthy history of prejudice and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims has characterized most Western societies, and this has been true of the United States as well.
- Arab Americans have experienced a high level of both individual and institutional discrimination, ranging from verbal abuse to physical attacks to official government policies.
- Islamophobia (fear and hostility toward Muslims), based on negative stereotypes, has been evident in the United States in the past several decades, reaching a high point following the terrorist attack of 9/11.
- A high degree of structural and cultural assimilation has occurred for first wave Arab Americans.
- Great obstacles stand in the way of assimilation for more recent generations of Arab Americans, but there are indications nonetheless of movement in that direction.

Critical Thinking

1. Why had Arab Americans been largely invisible as part of the American ethnic system until the occurrence of terrorist actions beginning in the 1970s?
2. Is ethnic profiling of Arab Americans similar to racial profiling of African Americans and Latinos?
3. Why do you suppose there has been so little understanding of the quite varied ethnic composition of the U.S. Muslim population? Why do most Americans associate "Muslim" with "Arab?"
4. Why do right-wing U.S. terrorists (skinheads, neo-Nazis, and the like) not get the same attention by the media and law enforcement agencies as terrorists with Muslim connections?

Personal/Practical Application

1. What is your reaction to seeing Muslim women wearing the hijab? Is your reaction different from seeing Orthodox Jewish men wearing kippas (skullcaps) or to Amish women who are easily identified by their bonnets? Make note of the unique garb of other religio-ethnic groups.

2. As we have seen in previous chapters, incidents of prejudice and discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities continue to occur in American society. Nonetheless, it is evident that there has been a noticeable decline of social tolerance of these attitudes and actions. No matter what their real beliefs and feelings may be, people using ethnic slurs, for example, are seen as violating an unwritten social norm. In the case of Arab and Muslim Americans, however, this trend does not seem to apply. Try to take note of how common these references to Arab Americans are made, where and by whom, and how they are reacted to.