

BOOK REVIEWS



Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects

Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds. Syracuse, NY:
Syracuse University Press, 2008. Pp. xiii, 378. ISBN 978-0-8156-3177-4.

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As a crucial addition to the field of Arab American studies, *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* also promises to critically expand the fields of ethnic studies, American studies, and Middle East studies by theorizing the dynamic intersections between race, nation, citizenship, religion, class, gender, and discourses of “civilization” in relation to Arab and Muslim Americans. Situating the events of September 11, 2001, as a “turning point” rather than a starting point of Arab and Muslim American engagements with race and racialization, this important collection takes the field of Arab American studies to the next level of theorizing by presenting a set of fresh, critical perspectives on the racialization of Arab and Muslim Americans. As suggested by its subtitle, *From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, the work seeks to broaden and deepen ethnic studies and critical race theory by complicating and problematizing the tropes of visibility and invisibility vis-à-vis ethnic/racial/religious identities.

Nadine Naber’s Introduction provides a wonderful framing for the collection by foregrounding the complexities of Arab American racial formation as a critical site of inquiry. Carefully locating the collection within competing discourses about race, racial classification, racial formation, and the “politics of naming” as well as the constructions of pan-Arab ethnic American identity, Naber sets forth a primary concern of the book: “How have dominant U.S. racial schemas positioned ‘the Arab’

and how have Arab immigrants and Arab Americans been required to engage with 'race' and 'racism'?" (20).

The strength of this collection is that it approaches the concept of racialization, in relation to Arab and Muslim Americans, from several competing and critical perspectives. Louise Cainkar's essay, "Thinking Outside the Box," focuses on the "racialization processes experienced by Arab Americans" (78), while Jen'nan Ghazal Read's "Discrimination and Identity Formation in a Post-9/11 Era" explores the complex interplay between ethnic, racial, and religious identities in Christian Arab American and Muslim Arab American experiences of discrimination. In "Civil Liberties and the Otherization of Arab and Muslim Americans," Amaney Jamal identifies racialization as "the single most durable explanation of support for ethnic civil liberty infringement" (117) on the rights of Muslim and Arab Americans. Combining an analysis of Arab and Muslim American experiences of racialization with theories of racial formation as a dynamic process, Nadine Naber's "Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming!" looks at the post-9/11 backlash against an imagined "Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim" enemy as a phenomenon constituted by the twin logics of cultural racism and nation-based racism (278-9).

Two contributions in particular extend the field of critical whiteness studies by investigating the ways Arab Americans complicate the concept of whiteness. In "'Whiteness' and the Arab Immigrant Experience," Sawsan Abdulrahim argues that the racialization of Arab Americans can be understood through dynamic identifications and counter-identifications with whiteness. By looking closely at the case of Nola Romey, a Syrian American grocer who was lynched in 1929, Sarah Gualtieri's "Strange Fruit? Syrian Immigrants, Extralegal Violence, and Racial Formation in the United States" argues for a careful consideration of the "submerged stories" (169) of racialization within dominant narratives of Arab American assimilation before World War II. Taking on the usefulness of the notion of racialization for theorizing Arab American experience, Andrew Shryock argues for the "benefits... [of] the taxonomic uncertainty that suspends Arab Americans between zones of whiteness, Otherness, and color" (111-12), in "The Moral Analogies of Race."

Still another set of contributions considers the politics of representation in relation to Arab and Muslim American racial formation. In terms of self-representation, Michelle Hartman analyzes how Arab American

literary anthologies “ally themselves with various canons and also... how they draw on discourses of racial identity” (173), in “Grandmothers, Grape Leaves, and Kahlil Gibran: Writing Race in Anthologies of Arab American Literature.” Moving toward an analysis of mainstream U.S. representations of Arab and Muslim Americans, as their title suggests, Suad Joseph and Benjamin D’Harlingue (with Alvin Ka Hin Wong) analyze representations of “Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the *New York Times*, Before and After 9/11.” They argue that the *New York Times* narrates Arab and Muslim Americans in ways that “have the effect of racializing religion, ethnicity, and nation” (230). Bringing these kinds of questions to the field of media studies, Evelyn Alsultany looks at the subtle racial logics of representations of Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and Muslim Americans in primetime U.S. TV dramas, arguing that they operate through complex configurations that she calls “ambivalent racism” and “momentary multiculturalism” (207).

Taken together, the articles in this collection are perfect for course adoption in ethnic studies and Arab American studies courses; they are aligned by a common interest in exploring the complexities of Arab American racial formation, yet they do so from wonderfully varied theoretical perspectives. The collection invites students and scholars alike to look at the ways in which the different theoretical tools within the varied fields of ethnic studies, American studies, and Middle East studies sometimes complement and sometimes contradict one another. In short, the conversation collected in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* is both original and firmly embedded within larger discussions about race and racial formation. Therefore, it is uniquely positioned to stretch these dialogues in vitally important ways.

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