

## **In the Way of the Prophet: Ideologies and Institutions in Dearborn, Michigan, America's Muslim Capital**

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*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*: on Fridays in America's Muslim capital of Dearborn, Michigan, the ancient Islamic sentence of invocation wafts over the blighted streets of greater Detroit, migrating out from a bustling Arab enclave and its Muslim residents as they gather for Friday *Jumu'ah* prayers.

A traveler passing southwestward from Detroit into suburban Dearborn witnesses a striking change of worlds, linguistic as well as cultural and economic, as streets dominated by commercialized sex and hourly-rental motels gradually give way to thriving shops such as Yasmeen's Bakery and the mosques of Warren Avenue. There, suddenly, our traveler encounters streetscapes of Arabic signage advertising Arab attorneys and physicians, hears passers-by speaking Levant and Gulf dialects of Arabic, and on the sidewalk passes covered women wearing the colorful headscarves of *hijab*. On Warren Avenue even a CVS sign gives equal prominence to English and Arabic. Here, worlds cross.

Dearborn is a microcosm of the Middle East, placed in the Middle West. Every Arab nationality may be found here, every religious sect, and every ideological persuasion, from Yemeni traditionalism to secular modernity and international commerce. Dearborn is a microcosm too of all it means at present for a community to be Muslim and Arab in America. There is, in the American consciousness, a myth of a unified Muslim world, characterized by the wearing of martyrs' headbands and *hijab*, by parading masses bearing the likeness of Khomeini, and by the suicide bomb. This mythical homogeneity is not the reality. While there are certainly believers in Khomeinism for those who would seek them – generally college-age males from the second generation of their family to live in the United States—their numbers are small, and demographics are against them. The growing Muslim masses, rather, are the international traders, the educated professionals, drawn from an ethnic community which on the national level attains advanced degrees at a rate twice that of the American populace as a whole. On an institutional level, a bustle of organizations strain to speak for the Arab and Muslim communities, reflecting a plethora of projects, strains and levels of religiosity. Some are sectarian, others nonreligious; some define their constituencies by a nationality or even a village, others pan-ethnically. The broader city, too, has evolved alongside Muslim Dearborn – the city's neighborhoods, patterns of commerce, and policy accommodations

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have grown and changed in response to its Muslim community; and Dearborn and its Muslim populace have evolved together, each shaping the other. The story of this evolution is the story of Dearborn; and Dearborn's story is in turn that of contemporary American Islam.

### **History of the Muslim Community in Dearborn**

Dearborn was founded as the first overnight stop on the stagecoach route linking Detroit to Chicago, a route still traversed today as Michigan Avenue. Its streets, such as Schaeffer, are named for the German Catholics who were its original inhabitants, giving way to the Polish and Italian ethnics now, in turn, being eclipsed by Arab immigrants and their descendents. A city of around 100,000, roughly 40 percent of Dearborn's inhabitants are Arab American. Dearborn's historical focus is the Ford Rouge River Plant in its Southend section. In its neighborhoods, it divides into down at heel Southend, now mostly populated by Yemenis; East Dearborn, a bustling Lebanese community of Arab restaurants, bakeries, and Halal butchers; and West Dearborn, a residential, graying area of Italian and Polish ethnics. Southfield Freeway is Dearborn's Berlin Wall, demarking between the city's west and east moieties.

The Muslim presence in metropolitan Detroit dates to the last decade of the nineteenth century, when residents of the Lebanese Biqa<sup>c</sup> Valley left an Ottoman province sagging from the weight of a surging population, the decline of its silk and vineyard sectors, and instability remaining from mid-century civil wars pitting Mt. Lebanon's Maronite Christians against its Druze. The unaccompanied male Muslim peddlers and traders followed a larger number of Lebanese Christians who had already emigrated. Detroit came to dominate as the destination of both in 1913, when Henry Ford began to offer generous five-dollar daily wages for workers at his Highland Park assembly line (this nearly double the era's prevailing daily wage of \$2.34, and for a workday of eight rather than nine hours). In 1927, Ford shifted operations to the Rouge River plant in his native Dearborn, and a Muslim neighborhood arose around Dix Road, in housing rows themselves constructed by Ford.

The first large wave of immigration took place from 1918 to 1924, beginning with the economic collapse of Lebanon at the end of the Ottoman Empire, and ending with the imposition of annual quotas of 100 immigrants on each Arab nation in the National Origins Act of 1924. An intervening period, lasting until the end of the Second World War, was one in which Dearborn Muslims reunited with their families (the Act permitted the immigration of wives and dependent children) and assimilated into American society. In 1945, there were approximately 200 Muslim families in Dearborn.

A second wave of immigration took place following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Two thousand Palestinian refugees were admitted into the United States in 1953 under a special Refugee Relief Act, and a further 985 were allowed entry through 1963. Dearborn attracted Sunni Muslims from the villages of Beit Hanina and Bireh, while Christians from Ramallah moved instead to western Wayne County. Additional Palestinian waves would follow the 1967 war and the Intifada and Arab economic

stagnation of 1988; secondary migration of Muslim Palestinians to Ohio has exerted a countervailing effect. The Palestinian waves of immigration changed the aspect of Dearborn's Arab community; where before it was generally Christian and laboring-class, it would subsequently become increasingly Muslim and professional, with immigrants arriving as refugees rather than economic migrants.

A third wave of immigrants were Shi'a Lebanese, displaced by civil war from the Biqa' Valley and the southern villages of Tibnin, Bint Jubayl, and Nabiteyeh. The Shi'a were attracted to Dearborn, settling in Southend and East Dearborn around Warren Street. Christians, in contrast, relocated to the west, in Farmington Hills, Westland, and Livonia. Their immigration was particularly high in 1975 to 1976, 1982 to 1985, and 1990 to 1991, a period in which taken together fully one third of Lebanon's residents emigrated.

A fourth wave, unaccompanied Yemeni males, dated to the beginning of Arab immigration to Dearborn but increased in magnitude in the mid-1970s. The Yemeni population contrasts with the other Muslim demographics in several ways: less educated and less fluent in English, but more strictly religious, they hold unskilled positions and send remittances back to family in Yemen, while shunning the corruptive influence of American society. Rather than bring their families to Dearborn, they themselves return to Yemen. From the mid-1980s on, an increasing proportion (rising from a tenth to a quarter) of Yemenis have immigrated as intact families rather than solitary males. They concentrate in Southend, which in contrast to the Beirut-influenced East Dearborn, shows the influence of the Yemeni countryside in dress, absence of women from public spaces, and the concentration of male social life in coffeehouses.

A fifth and final wave has been the southern Shi'a Iraqis, fleeing the failed revolt against Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. Coming chiefly from Basra, Al Nasiriyya, and the Al 'Amarah and Hawr al Hammar marshes, roughly 33,000 survivors were evacuated to the Rafgha refugee camp in Saudi Arabia, where they were persecuted by both Saudi and Iraqi security services. Nearly ten thousand were granted asylum in the United States and were settled throughout the nation; in an impressive secondary migration, nearly all subsequently resettled in Dearborn, where they have formed a tightly knit community located along Dearborn's northern border with Detroit.

There is considerable variance among the Arab communities in terms of their assimilation, employment, and economic status. The Iraqis and Yemenis, often from agricultural backgrounds, are particularly vulnerable to economic contraction in their unskilled positions in the automobile industry. The settling pattern of immigrants in Dearborn reflects nationalities of origin, but not villages, which intermix. Collectively, the Arabs of Dearborn represent the largest concentration of Muslims and Arabs in the United States, second only to Paris outside the Middle East.

### **History of Ideas and Ideologies among Dearborn Muslims**

The rise and evolution of the institutions of Dearborn's Muslim community has reflected the convergence their of various ideological currents originating in the Middle

East or in broader American society, which in Dearborn collided and flowed together. In the interwar years, the Muslim community was influenced principally by a desire to assimilate into mainstream American life, and by American notions of civic secularism and subsumption and adaptation of religion to society. The first notable, distinct ideology to appear was Nasserism, from the mid-1950s until 1967. Though the defiant, secular pan-Arabism of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Naṣir) concealed a burgeoning population and police state, his nationalization of the Suez Canal and successful completion of infrastructural projects such as the Aswan High Dam restored pride to an Arab world shamed by defeat by Israel in 1948. In Dearborn, Nasser's portrait was displayed in the mosques, and university students immersed themselves in Egyptian culture.

Nasserism fell, however, in 1967 as Israeli tanks rolled across the Sinai. The failure of secular pan-Arabism created a space for ferment and the rise of new ideologies, which would be filled principally by the symbology of Palestine, by Islamic revivalism, and by the American civil rights movement and urban radicalism. Palestinian nationalism, drawing on both Nasser's postcolonialism and his defeat by Israel, became the symbolic coinage of Arab politics, and symbolic echoes of Palestinian nationalism dotted Dearborn. After 1967, its American Federation of Ramallah added Palestine to its name, as Palestinian identity surmounted that of village. The city also began to boast a Shatila Bakery, a sister-cities relationship with Qana, and personalized license plates recalling Jenin and other villages.

The American civil rights movement contributed to Dearborn's Muslims a willingness to construct a distinct Arab American identity, a process which in the late 1960s was influenced by Malcolm X and Chicano nationalism. In 1979, a third current was added by the Iranian Revolution, which appealed to a number of Shi'a refugees. Its appeal was somewhat more religious than political: in particular, it stressed the duty of Muslims to resist accommodation with surrounding non-Islamic society, and to follow personal religious leaders (marji' taqlid) and work to establish Islamic states. Developed by Khomeini, the ideology of the Islamic revolution was imported strikingly to Dearborn when the spiritual guide of Hizbullah, Sheikh Al Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, spoke to an enthusiastic audience in neighboring Southfield's Bonnie Brook Country Club. A competing ideology for Lebanese refugees was that of Harakat Amal ("movement of hope"), a centrist Lebanese Shi'a movement led by Sayyid Musa Sadr and espousing a greater Shi'a role within a multiconfessional Lebanon, free of Syrian and Israeli influence. Support for Amal is strongest among refugees from the southern villages and Beirut suburbs, while Hizbullah's is concentrated among former residents of the Biqa' Valley (known as Biqa'i). Hizbullah surged in popularity after Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982, then waned in the later 1990s. Institutionally, the ideology of Hizbullah and the Islamic revolution is particularly represented in the Islamic Institute of Knowledge and Islamic Council of America, as well as in the Al-Mabarrat Charitable Association, headed by Sheikh Fadlallah, which has a storefront office on Schaeffer Street. Amal's support stretches more broadly, and is particularly strong in the Islamic Center of America and among more assimilated Lebanese. Musa Sadr's successor as leader of the movement, the current Lebanese assembly speaker Nabih Berri, has lived in Dearborn, and continues to have family there.

All of these ideologies collided in a number of venues, including the city's mosques, coffee shops such as Kamel's on Southend's Dix Road, and the city's two university campuses (the University of Michigan at Dearborn and Henry Ford Community College). They played out as well on the streets, where marches and demonstrations became common in support of Palestinian and Lebanese national aspirations. They played out in mosques, though ideology and politics are never mentioned from the pulpit. However, the collision of Americanization with the Islamic revolution would require skilled statesmanship from imams seeking to maintain a broad church between both, and also in secession and creation of new institutions by those who wished to reflect the latter more purely. This is the story of the next section.

### **Evolution of Mosques in Dearborn**

Islam in Dearborn predates the formal existence of mosques in the city. An early cleric refusing payment for religious duties, and supporting himself by selling vegetables to stores from his truck, was Sheikh Khalil Bezzi, a Najaf-educated Shi'ci originally from Bint Jubayl. Construction on the first mosque in Dearborn, the nation's second, began slowly in the 1930s. Led by the controversial, Americanizing autodidact Imam Hussein Karoub and with a congregation of Lebanese Sunnis originally from Lebanon's coastal port cities, this community gradually raised a mosque on Southend's Dix road from the 1930's until 1957, when the dome was finally erected. At a time when Lebanese immigrants were consolidating families and orienting themselves toward Dearborn, construction of the mosque provided a task in which they might organize for the first time, and summon all of their financial resources through fundraisers and a significant woman's auxiliary, the American Moslem Women's Society. In the 1950s, the mosque's men brought a graduate of Egypt's Al-Azhar University, Dr. Ahmed Mehanna, to the imamship to promote a stricter, less Americanized Islam; his five-year tenure would be marked by conflict between Americanizing and Arabizing factions.

A Yemeni wave of immigration to Dix in the 1960s led to the dramatic takeover of the mosque in 1976 by a cluster of Yemeni and Palestinian Islamicist *musalee'een*, led by the fiery Palestinian Hajj Fawzi. Breaking into the mosque one Friday when it was closed for prayer and then wresting control of the mosque through board elections and litigation, they invited a young Saudi-trained Yemeni sheikh to be imam. Finding the mosque's women's group opposed to his Arabizing reforms, he banned them entirely from the mosque when they protested his prohibition of weddings and fundraising events from the mosque's basement, and required women to enter through a side door, don hijab, and remain within certain areas of the mosque. This sheikh's tenure would be short – he was forced to resign and return to Yemen after molesting a twelve-year old girl – but the Yemeni, conservative, and Arabic-speaking takeover of the mosque was complete, and with time it has come to reflect the Yemeni Zaydi sect of Sunni Islam.

Two mosques arose in response to the Dix Road mosque: one (the Hashemite Hall in Dix) early in its history to provide a Shi'ca alternative, and the other (Bekaa Center in East

Dearborn) in 1983 by Biqa'ī Sunnis displaced from Dix, where women continued to exert a powerful role financially and on the center's board.

The most significant of Dearborn's (and the nation's) mosques, the Islamic Center of America was formed by the highly-educated Lebanese native Imam Mohamad Jawad Chirri, himself one of the central figures in American Islamic history. Arriving in Dearborn to the Hashemite Hall, he was taken aback by factional rivalry between Arabizers and Americanizers, and left to Dearborn to serve a mosque in Michigan City, Indiana—a period his supporters would come to dub his "Hijra." An Islamic Center Foundation Society formed to invite Imam Chirri to return as imam of a new mosque; he complied, and began to raise funds to construct a mosque on Joy Road, several blocks into Detroit from East Dearborn. His fundraising would yield \$44,000 from Nasser himself (Chirri having befriended one of Nasser's acquaintances in Lebanon), \$7,000 from Jordan, and substantial amounts from the community itself. The minaret of the Islamic Center of America, or Jami' (as it is locally known in Arabic), was raised in 1963. The mosque quickly acquired a congregation of Biqa'ī families, many from Bint Jubayl, who had previously been attending the Hashemite Hall or Dix mosque. Imam Chirri exerted considerable personal control over the Center, and was therefore able to steer a course between the preferences of his mosque's more Americanized and conservative constituencies, while simultaneously attempting to create a favorable public image in America of his religion.

His task was unenviable, and required some ideological fluidity. Always grateful to Nasser, he initially distanced himself from Palestinian nationalism but became publicly in his opposition to Israel as his mosque filled with Lebanese refugees. Aligning himself generally with Amal, he nonetheless retained good words for Khomeini and Hizbullah in his pamphlet *The Shi'ites Under Attack*, and displayed a photograph of the Ayatollah in the mosque's foyer. Proponents of Americanization during the 1950s and 1960s could take heart in his fluent English, the large Sunday services he provided for Muslim families (so that they could pray on the same day as their Christian neighbors), and his frequent public appearance in a business suit, and no tuban. When he responded to the conservative desires of newer immigrants (hijab became common practice, where it had not been before, and the use of the Center for wedding dances and other communal celebrations, common until the 1960s, ceased), some Americanized Muslims felt the earlier product of creating a distinctively American Islamic community had been diverted, but they remained among the mosque's fold.

Imam Chirri's death in 1994 led eventually to his succession by Imam Sayed Hassan Qazwini, a cleric in Chirri's mold who like him has also attained national prominence as the nation's most visible imam. Sayed Qazwini's leadership has been marked by the construction of a new \$15 million complex on a ten-acre site on Ford Road near the two college campuses, and the opening of the Muslim American Youth Academy (with 170 day students in kindergarten to sixth grade). Before Imam Qazwini's arrival, the Center was briefly led by Sheikh Attat from the Biqa' Valley and Sheikh Ilahi from Iran, both partisans of the Khomeinist message who both would leave the mosque. Sheikh Attat left to form a *masjid* on Warren Avenue which caters to mostly Biqa'īs, and Ilahi to found

the Islamic House of Wisdom (*Dar al-Hikma*, named for a vast Fatimid Cairene library in the eleventh century) near the intersection of Warren Avenue and Schaefer Street. Two other mosques had been formed earlier to serve new immigrants seeking more Arab forms of religion with regard to women's dress, use of English, and the acceptability of compromise with American culture, the Islamic Institute of Knowledge (or Majma<sup>c</sup>, founded 1981) and the Islamic Council of America (or the Majils, founded 1989). The Islamic Institute takes as its core principles propagation of true Islam (versus merely "approximating Islam," of which they accuse the Islamic Center), and an active involvement in the fairs of south Lebanon, generally through support of the Hizbullah movement. It has a competing grade school, the American Islamic Academy. The Institute's Sheikh <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Latif Berri nursed an intense private dislike of Sheikh Chirri, but neither gave public face to the animosity, and both in public played down the breach. Where the focus and flavor of the Institute is Lebanese, that of the Islamic Council is Iranian, from Sheikh Burro's Qom training and taste for all things Iranian, to the presence of Iranian chadors in the mosque, alongside the more prevalent hijabs and Iraqi <sup>c</sup>abayas. A final mosque, the Karbalaa Islamic Educational Center, was established in 1993 as a community for the Iraqi Shi'a refugee population by Sheikh Hisham Al-Husainy, in the 6,000 square-foot hall on Warren Avenue which formerly was Club Gay Haven. With approximately 200 congregants, its financial scene has improved after initial years marked by financial struggle (with mortgage payments, operating bills, and assistance to refugees competing in a limited budget), combined with difficulties with City Hall (its assistant director, Baker Albaaj, says the city made the permit process difficult to avoid losing a business).

### **The Muslim Community in Non-Sectarian and Civil Structures**

The history of Muslim Dearborn is of course not merely the story of its mosques: predictably, Muslim participation in both local non-sectarian Arab organizations and the political institutions of municipal governance has been substantial, and each has affected the evolution of the other.

The non-sectarian Arab-American organizations in Dearborn—like their counterparts at the national level—date collectively to 1967, and combination of the failure of Nasserism with the rise in northern U.S. cities of urban radicalism and social movements of the New Left. The most prominent in Dearborn, ACCESS (the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services), was founded and is still led by Ishmael Ahmed, and emerged from the combination of second-generation Arab American college students with pan-Arab foreign students. Hassen Jaber, the group's vice president, describes the initial phase of the resulting group as one of great idealism and little institutional development. As refugees from southern Lebanon began to arrive in Dearborn, the group's leaders commissioned a University of Michigan professor to conduct a study of the immigrant population and found possibly the highest infant mortality rate in the nation, a unemployment rate of 30 percent, and two-thirds of the community unable to speak English, and one-third illiterate in Arabic, compounded by alarming incidences of post-traumatic and other emotional syndromes. In response, the group began providing

volunteer services to immigrants, assisting them with English, employment searches, and the welfare, social security, and immigration bureaucracies.

ACCESS's beginnings were not easy. The mosques regarded it as an institutional competitor, run, still worse, by radicals and atheists. Its first building was burnt twice through arson. Personal devotion by its leaders and the addition of a professional grant writer permitted the group to grow from the backroom of a Southend store, to Salina Street and the former building of the Yemeni Benevolent Society, to (when the latter was destroyed by fire) a one-room Southend office in the former Joe Hamood Recreation Center which it now owns, and now as well to two gleaming new buildings on Schaeffer Street dedicated to health care and employment counseling. The privatization of Michigan social services and have increased the number of social-service functions ACCESS may compete for state funding to provide, and their unique language and cultural expertise permit them to be quite competitive. At present, the organization derives three quarters of its operating budget from government sources, the remainder from private fundraising. Hassan Jaber refers to ACCESS's principal challenge at present as being the preservation of the group's democratic internal dynamics (all positions are filled by biennial elections) while growing at a rate at which it presently doubles clients every three to four years, and budget every five.

Other than ACCESS, noteworthy local institutions in the Muslim community include the *Arab American News* (in Arabic, *Al-Watan*), published since September 1984 by Osama Siblani and with a weekly circulation of 22,000, and a highly energetic and entrepreneurial American Arab Chamber of Commerce (founded 1992) which assists local businesses in trade and investment projects with the Middle East. Public-access cable channel 15 broadcasts several hours of Muslim programming daily in Dearborn, which include Muslim speeches and programs entitled Al-Salam TV, Al Rabitah, and the Voice of Unity. Two of the larger village communities have formal institutions, the Bint Jbeil Cultural Center and the older and larger American Federation of Ramallah. In addition, kinship and clan ties, and deference to particular elders, exists behind the formal apparatus of community governance, and the boards and trustees of mosques and secular organizations.

#### *Public schools and the school board*

The Dearborn Public Schools have responded to pressure from organized groups of concerned parents, the school board, and the federal and state governments in making several accommodations to Muslim students in the last several years. Parental advocacy has resulted, in the past school year, in experimental introduction of Halal food into the public schools and separation of male and female gym classes in Southend's Salina Elementary School. Accommodation of Muslim holidays has in general been mandated upon the school district by a state law removing state funding for any school day for which 80 percent of students are absent, furthermore, such a day cannot count for the required number of annual school days. As a result of state statute, then, it has become rarer to have such instances as when three years ago, a predominantly Muslim public school opened on Eid ul-Fitr, with 3 of its 700 students in attendance. A similar process

has been that in which the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education has mandated on the school district each of its expansions of bilingual education for Arab-speaking immigrant students.

The school board has been the site at which members of the Arab and Muslim communities have first participated in elected city positions. Allen Amen, when elected to the school board, became the first Arab American to serve in elected office in Dearborn. More recently, a bond issue led to the emergence of a cohesive and energetic pro-Arab and Muslim bloc on the board, leading in turn to a new level of Arab and Muslim involvement in city politics. A declining school-age population in West Dearborn, and rapid increase in that of East Dearborn, led to busing as an unpopular but accepted solution. However, in 1999 the proposal of bond issue for \$50 million which paid little attention to East Dearborn schools led to the spontaneous rise of an ad hoc organization called Dearborn Citizens for Better Education, led by Mary Wise (whose husband is Lebanese-chk?) with assistance from southern Lebanon-born Wayne County assistant prosecutor Abed Hammoud. The bond issue was defeated at the polls in 1999 by 300 votes; and again in 2000 by 720. In 2002, a pro-Arab bloc of Aimee Blackburn and Mary Wise, both newly elected on the school board, was able to place a \$150 million bond on the ballot providing three new elementary schools and 26 new high school classrooms for Arab and Muslim neighborhoods. The remainder of the board acquiesced in the certainty that this bond, too, would fail. Hammoud, Blackburn, and Wise promoted the new bond within the Arab community as strenuously as they had opposed the first two, with the result that the proposal carried with 900 votes. The bond campaign led to the thriving of an Arab American Political Action Committee, originally launched in January 1998, and led first by Hammoud and now by Osama Siblani. Run democratically, like ACCESS, in its internal workings, the group elects its officials, invites candidates from all parties to make presentations to the group, and votes on which candidates to endorse.

### *City politics*

There had been earlier victories for those who would fight city hall. A city urban renewal project in the late 1960s which would have demolished a large portion of Southend, thus displacing the Arab Muslim community, failed when neighborhood activist Allen Amen brought suit against the city. Yet at present, Arab exclusion from city hall and the police force is rampant, and shocking. Current Mayor Michael Guido first won office the 1985 running against "our Arab problem," and subsequently has subtly played the spectre of Arab takeover in elections while spouting such memorable statements as "if you want to help immigrants, teach them hygiene." His administration has not taken the trouble to hire Arabs into either municipal administration or into the police force, and this in a city with a quarter of its population much more conversant in Arabic than in English. Muslim and Arab estrangement from municipal government has resulted not only in those community's inadequate servicing by police and other emergency and city officials, but also has created other points at which city policy is unresponsive to the Muslim community's needs—for instance, there is little public transportation in Dearborn, inhibiting access to health care or employment for Muslim

spouses lacking their own car. White elected officials from West Dearborn tend to boast of their “good ties” to the Arab community, while complaining to me off the record of that community’s growing influence within the city. The Arabs, on the other hand feel marginalized by September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and while Dearborn whites brag about how well Dearborn weathered the terrorist attacks, the Arabs are quicker to remember the broken storefront windows, the threatening 2:00 a.m. telephone calls, and the highway graffiti insulting to the Prophet. The city, furthermore, lacks efforts—municipal, civil, or religious—to knit together the growing Arab and the declining Italian and Polish ethnic communities. Some, such as Abed Hammoud, worry that when there eventually comes to be an Arab American and Muslim mayor, absent the bases of cross-communal understanding having been laid beforehand, the white community may follow Detroit’s example with its black population and flee the city to further removed white enclaves. A mayoral candidacy by Hammoud had the misfortune of a primary on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, from which it never recovered. But the community’s political muscles are flexing, and more, one suspects, is to come.

### **Discussion: Muslims and the Broader Community**

If Dearborn is a microcosm, what might we seek to learn from it about how a Muslim enclave changed the city that surrounds it, and how new institutions arose and old ones adjusted to respond to this variegated Muslim community’s presence, needs, and beliefs?

Among other things, Dearborn provides a striking example of the tremendously revitalizing effect the immigration of a highly educated workforce can have on depressed local economies, augmented by trade ventures derived from family and personal ties to a country of origin. It also provides an example of strong generational trends of assimilation, as Dearborn’s immigrant groups move away from orientation toward their country of birth, and toward ethnic politics oriented toward their city hall, state capital, and Washington. In this, the pattern of Dearborn Muslims would not be materially different from that of other immigrant groups fleeing conflict in their country of origin.

The broader story is what Dearborn portends for the future of the American Arab and Islamic communities, as the burgeoning capital of both. And the broader story seems quite good. Compared with blight and poverty on all sides of them, the Arabs of Dearborn have made a thriving and prosperous middle eastern enclave, where they are weaving forth a spectrum of civil society organizations, international trade to enrich their region, and an inevitable desire to secure greater political influence for their community shared by every other immigrant community in the United States’s history. There are dark sides and complexities, shared by the Irish, the Kosovar Albanians, and every other immigrant group which has ever brought its own politics to the U.S. after leaving its own homeland as reluctant refugees, but the processes of reorienting to trade and normal ethnic politics centered on Washington and city hall rather than Lebanon are strongly advanced and promising. And driving down thirty miles of blighted Michigan Avenue massage parlors and hourly-rental hotels to see this thriving, bustling community, one might be forgiven for imagining the U.S. needs all the Arabs it can get.

## **Bibliography and For Further Reading:**

While much remains to be written on the situation of Muslims in America and in metropolitan Detroit, there have nonetheless been several excellent initial studies:

- \* Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shyroch, eds., *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2000), in particular Dr. Abraham's chapter on "Arab Detroit's 'American' Mosque."
- \* Linda S. Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1996).
- \* Michael W. Suleiman, ed., *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 2000).
- \* The Pluralism Project at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, <http://www.umd.umich.edu/pluralism/>.
- \* There are also a number of edited volumes by Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito on the subject, including *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (Haddad and Esposito, eds., Oxford University Press, 2000) and *The Muslims of America* (Haddad, ed., Oxford University Press, Religion in America series, 1993).