

Arab Americans continue to face both stigma and acceptance

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Arab and Muslim Americans continue to face an unusual degree of both discrimination and acceptance, according to a University of Michigan researcher who headed an in-depth study of the nation's most visible Arab and Chaldean communities.

"The post-9/11 backlash against Detroit area Arab and Muslim Americans was strong and immediate," said U-M researcher Wayne Baker, co-author of "Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11," just published by the Russell Sage Foundation. "Detroit was drawn into the 'War on Terror' almost by political reflex and in many respects the impact is continuing."

Baker, a research scientist at the U-M Institute for Social Research and a professor at the Ross School of Business, is part of the Detroit Arab American Study Team that includes U-M researchers Sally Howell, Ann Chih Lin, Andrew Shryock, Ronald Stockton and Mark Tessler, and Princeton University researcher Amaney Jamal. All are co-authors of "Citizenship and Crisis."

In the book, the team explores how the cultural prejudices that have often marginalized the Detroit Arab community came to a head after 9/11, and analyzes how the Arab communities of metropolitan Detroit have continued to thrive despite significant backlash from the crisis.

"Arabs and Muslims living in the U.S. repeatedly face situations in which their countries of origin, or Arabs and Muslims generally, are cast

as enemies of the United States and its allies in the Middle East," Baker said. "As a result, Arab Americans must continually prove themselves, assuring their fellow nationals that they belong here, that they are loyal, that they are not a threat to national security."

As such, the book's authors believe Arab Americans highlight the contradictions in the multicultural ethos that dominates the concept and practice of citizenship in the United States. Arab Americans, they say, have been singled out for harsh treatment, including selective surveillance, deportation and detention without due process, as well as presumptive freezing of financial assets, vandalism and personal insults. But they also have been the beneficiaries of the politics of inclusion and acceptance.

Detroit has seen the establishment of the Arab American National Museum, the expansion of Arab American community organizations, and the election and appointment of Arab and Muslim citizens to political office, the authors point out. The area has also seen new partnerships between Arab American civil rights organizations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as well as the creation of Arab American and Islamic studies programs in area universities, and the founding and expansion of at least a dozen new mosques.

The Detroit Arab and Muslim communities also have faced additional challenges—the intensification of violence in Iraq, further dispossession and bloodshed in Gaza and the West Bank, a devastating Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, and the continued scrutiny, suspicion and tactical harassment of Arab and Muslim Americans by the law enforcement arms of their own government.

But the authors conclude that there are also good reasons for optimism, and for hope that the tensions between inclusion and stigma ultimately

serve to bind the community, spurring efforts to organization and activism that are essential to the Detroit area Arab community's success.

Provided by University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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