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The Other Settlers: Arabs in the American West, 1528-Present

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

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October 2021

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Rana Dawn Razek

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To my pioneers

محمد زكي عبد الرازق وهناء الامام

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ABSTRACT

The Other Settlers: Arabs in the American West, 1528-Present

by

Rana Dawn Razek

“The Other Settlers” is an Arab American history of the American West which places immigration, race, and colonialism at the heart of the narrative. This dissertation will describe the ways in which Arab immigrants came to settle in the American West, their roles in the mythology, conquest, and settlement of the region, and how Arab American individuals and communities were positioned, seen, and came to see themselves throughout the process.

Arab Americans are a racially liminal group, and the diverse ethno-racial landscape of the American West provides a rich terrain for assessing Arab American sameness to and difference from other racial and ethnic groups, especially Asian Americans. This relational approach will move beyond studies that assess Arab American identity narrowly in relation only to Whiteness, and will emphasize the fluidity of Arab racial and ethnic identities.

This dissertation is also part of a larger effort to examine and complicate the intersections among immigration, race, and colonialism, particularly with respect to racialized groups who were colonized peoples in their own homelands. The history of

colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa has animated strongly anticolonial and anti-imperialist Arab identities and movements in the region and in the diaspora. In the context of the United States, Arab immigrants became settlers, particularly after they secured a White racial designation. Although Syrian immigrants were often racialized as non-White in practice, legal Whiteness was critical for reaping the rewards of westward expansion.

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INTRODUCTION

In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is, and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to recreate oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating: one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history.¹

James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," Ebony Magazine, 1965

In 1538, a Moroccan slave entered the Zuni village of Hawikku, in present-day New Mexico, on a quest to find rumored cities of gold for the Spanish Crown. In 1856, a man by the name of Hadji Ali led a herd of camels from the bustling port city of Ottoman Smyrna to the Gulf Coast of Texas, to help the U.S. Army conquer lands dominated by the Comanche and Apache nations. In 1907, at the age of thirty-five, Syrian immigrant Aisha Mostafa crossed the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso, Texas, to evade stringent immigration restrictions recently imposed at Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York harbor. After her crossing, Mostafa took a homestead in Mountrail County, North Dakota, on lands that had recently been part of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, domain of the Three Affiliated Tribes: Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. On February 4, 1931, James George Abourezk was born to Syrian homesteaders Lina and Bishara "Charlie" Abourezk, on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in south central South Dakota. As a United States senator, Abourezk sponsored federal Indian policies designed

¹ James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," *Ebony Magazine*, August 1965, 47.

for and by American Indians after the standoff between activists and the federal government on the hallowed ground of Wounded Knee.

“The Other Settlers” is an Arab American history of the trans-Mississippi West that centers race and colonialism in narratives of immigration and settlement.² Spanning the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries, this study focuses on five key episodes in which Arabs shaped and were shaped by the region’s history. While each chapter chronicles a singular vignette, the overall arc of the narrative begins with the Spanish conquest of the Americas and ends with a twentieth century story of Arab American-Indigenous allyship—from the “first contact” narrative of the “first Arab American,” to one Arab American’s contribution to the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and reparations. I also examine Arab Americans’ ambiguous racial positioning in Western contexts, and the privilege legal Whiteness afforded Syrian immigrants by the early twentieth century. With these stories, “The Other Settlers” describes how, at different times and in different places, Arab peoples traveled to and through the American West, their roles in the mythology, conquest, and settlement of the region, and how Arab American individuals and communities were positioned, seen, and came to see themselves throughout the process, and in relation to other racial and ethnic groups.

With some exceptions, the first significant migration of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Arabic-speaking peoples to the United States were Ottoman Syrians. This migration began in earnest in the 1870s and virtually ended in 1924, when Congress enacted the draconian Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, otherwise known as the National

² Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Origins Act. Before World War I, “Syria” as we know it today did not exist as a nation; the geographic area called “Greater Syria” described the Levantine province of the Ottoman Empire bounded by the Taurus Mountains in the north and the Sinai Peninsula in the south; its western border was the Mediterranean Sea, and its shifting eastern boundary lay in the Syrian desert near present-day Iraq.³ What was then Ottoman Greater Syria now represents the states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In the late nineteenth century, instability in the silk industry led to social and economic changes in the Mount Lebanon *Mutasarrifate*, a political subdivision of Greater Syria, which drove migration to the Americas and elsewhere. As many as one-third of the population of Mount Lebanon, or three hundred thousand persons, left the region by 1914.⁴ Precise numbers for early Syrian immigration to the United States are difficult to assess because the U.S. government initially categorized them as “Turks,” from “Turkey in Asia.” After 1899, Arabic-speaking immigrants were classified and came to see themselves as “Syrians.” Between the 1880s and 1924, somewhere in the range of 50,000 to 100,000 Syrians migrated to the United States. Most late nineteenth and early twentieth century Syrian immigrants were Eastern Rite Christians (Maronite, Melkite, and Antiochian Orthodox) and about five to ten percent were Muslim (including both Sunni and Shi’a). A large majority of the so-called “first wave” came from present-day Lebanon. The first generation of Syrian immigrants were mostly uneducated farmers

³ Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

and artisans who joined the ranks of the American working class as peddlers, grocers, retailers, and industrial workers in the Northeast and upper Midwest.

Although Syrian immigrants were initially accorded citizenship without question, in 1909, their racial eligibility for naturalization was challenged based on the Nationality Act of 1790, which limited citizenship to “free white persons.” In what are now called the “racial prerequisite cases,” which determined racial eligibility for citizenship, the courts faced the problem of defining the boundaries of White racial identity. The courts relied primarily on scientific (ethnological) and common knowledge understandings of White identity in making racial determinations. In some of the naturalization cases, Syrians were deemed “Asiatic” and denied citizenship, and in others, Syrians’ White racial status was affirmed, highlighting the contingent and constructed nature of racial categories. In 1915, the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals settled the matter in favor of a Syrian immigrant named George Dow; in *Dow v. United States*, the court ruled that Syrians were part of the “Semitic branch of the Caucasian race,” and therefore eligible for naturalization. Still, Syrians continued to face discrimination and outsider status—Syrians were often called “nigger,” “dago,” and “sheeny,” racial epithets commonly imposed on Black, Italian, and Jewish peoples. Despite their legal Whiteness, Syrians were not always, or perhaps even often, considered socially White in the early twentieth century United States. For example, during this period, in my hometown of Wichita, Kansas, Syrian immigrants were called the “West Side Indians,” an epithet which referred not only to their immigrant enclave in the Delano District, on the west side of town, but also to their racial difference from Wichita’s White majority.

Cold War geopolitics reshaped U.S. immigration policy in the 1950s-1960s, with profound implications for Arab American immigration and racial and ethnic identity. In 1952, Congress relaxed immigration laws, and the 1965 Immigration Act, also called the Hart-Cellar Act, removed the racial and national quotas that had been in place since 1924. These reforms reopened the gates to a new generation of Arab immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa, and greatly diversified the national origins of new arrivals. At the same time, U.S. interventions in the Middle East since World War II also stimulated migration. The “second wave” of Arab immigrants came under very different circumstances than did the previous generation, including Palestinian, Yemeni, and Lebanese migrants and refugees fleeing displacement and civil war. Not only did their circumstances vary greatly from those of the first wave, they differed from their predecessors in other critical ways—they were, on the whole, more educated, many more were Muslim, and they were far more political, bringing powerful Arab identities inspired by Arab nationalism. At the same time, deepening U.S. imperialism and intervention in the Middle East activated age-old Orientalist tropes that signified Arabs and Muslims as the anti-American Other. As a result, and until today, many of these second wave Arab immigrants, and some descendants of the old guard, feel a stronger affinity with Black and Indigenous people and people of color than with White Americans.⁵

In the past, the history of United States immigration and ethnic identity were considered in terms of the immigrant assimilation model or the “Ellis Island paradigm,” the one-way migration, settlement, and assimilation or acculturation of non-English

⁵ Amany Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse: University of Syracuse Press, 2008).

Europeans to Anglo American norms.⁶ While this nostalgic and celebratory narrative holds true for many White Americans of European descent, it does not represent the history of all Americans. The frequent exclusion of non-European “Others” from this model renders the narrative not so much inaccurate as incomplete.⁷ The Ellis Island model focuses on culture change, which disregards power dynamics that tend to preclude the experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples and other communities of color in the United States. In *Almost All Aliens*, Paul Spickard integrates these themes into a single narrative of U.S. history spanning the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, which serves as a corrective to the Ellis Island paradigm. Spickard argues that the assimilation model ignores “the manifestly larger and more important historical issue: White people killing Indians, spreading across the landscape, and taking it. All that is about race, power, and colonialism. These are central issues in the story of American immigration.”⁸ While traditional immigration historians described the assimilation of European ethnics to Anglo American norms, Spickard describes the creation of a hierarchy of pan-

⁶ Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 6. See also, Paul Spickard, “Introduction: Immigration and Race in United States History,” in *Race and Immigration in the United States: New Histories*, Paul Spickard, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-12; Mae M. Ngai, “Immigration and Ethnic History,” in *American History Now*, Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 258-375. Some examples of the Ellis Island paradigm of U.S. immigration history include, Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America: The Saga of the Immigrant* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁷ Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, xviii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

ethnicities including White, Black, Asian, American Indian, and so on, a process called “racial formation.”⁹

Recently, the concept of the “peopling of America” has also developed as a broad framework for understanding United States immigration history. This narrative begins with the crossing of human beings over the Bering Strait land bridge about 16,500 years ago, and includes the settlement of European colonists, enslaved Africans’ forced migration to the Americas, and the histories of various groups of voluntary immigrants.¹⁰ It is a framework that reflects the mantra that the United States is a “nation of immigrants.”¹¹ But, as Mae M. Ngai points out, while this all-encompassing framework is certainly inclusive, it also elides “important analytical distinctions between indigeneity

⁹ An important theoretical work that signaled the shift from the assimilation paradigm to studies of racial formation is Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s 1994 sociological study *Racial Formation in the United States*, which examines the social construction of race as a process by which racial categories are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” through political struggle. Omi and Winant show how “race” is constructed through both representation and social structure in what they call “racial projects.” Rather than viewing immigration and immigrants through the lens of “assimilation” to American social and cultural norms, scholars chronicled the creation of pan-ethnic categories or “races” including the White race, and becoming White is intimately tied to becoming American. George Lipsitz, James Barrett, David Roediger, and others pioneered the subfield of “Whiteness Studies.” Inspired by the work of W.E.B. DuBois, these scholars have shown the economic, social, political, and psychological “wages” associated with White racial status. Groups claiming Whiteness often did so by distancing themselves from African Americans. In 1996, Ian Haney Lopez’s *White by Law* explored the legal construction of race, and the courts’ rationales for deciding who was and was not White, and thus eligible for citizenship. On Whiteness and pan-ethnic formation see among many others, Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Ngai, 358.

¹¹ See John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York: Harper Collins, 1964).

and conquest, between coerced and voluntary migrations.”¹² This dissertation aims to highlight these critical differences.

Over the past three decades, historical studies of Arab American immigration and ethnic identity formation have mirrored historiographical developments in the fields of immigration history and Ethnic Studies. In her pioneering book, *Becoming American*, Alixa Naff described early Syrian immigrants through the Ellis Island paradigm. Writing in the 1980s against a backdrop of heightened discrimination against Arabs and Arab Americans, Naff argued that Syrian immigrants’ competitiveness and status consciousness drove them to assimilate quickly and willingly, and itinerant peddling, a common occupation for Syrians, was the primary means by which they did so. For Naff, the racial prerequisite cases were a mere anomaly in the relatively unproblematic assimilation of Syrian immigrants to American life. She remarked that “the events of those few critical years [1909-1915] constituted an aberration that marred only the Syrians’ memory of that period,” and that “if political and economic events had not reactivated Arab immigration and an interest in Arab culture, Syrian-Americans might have assimilated themselves out of existence.”¹³ Naff’s account of early Syrian immigration, assimilation, and upward mobility challenged the contemporary notion that Arabs were and are perpetual foreigners, unassimilable “Others.”

More recently, race and racial formation—not assimilation—are at the center of Arab American Studies scholarship, and the prerequisite cases have figured prominently in

¹² Ngai, 358.

¹³ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Arab American Experience* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1985).

these analyses. Helen Hatab Samhan, Lisa Suhair Majaj, and others emphasize the incongruity between Arab Americans' legal racial categorization and popular perceptions. Sarah Gualtieri's *Between Arab and White* shows not only how late nineteenth and early twentieth century Syrians became legally White, but how race became central to Syrian American ethnic identity. In the American context, Syrians came to view themselves in racial terms, arguing that their Christian heritage (their traditional mode of identification) and economic success proved their belonging to the White race. Gualtieri also demonstrates the instability of Syrian Whiteness in "other sites of interaction," like stores and restaurants; she writes, "even with their victories in the courts, Syrians continued to be perceived as not fully [W]hite but somewhere in between the poles of 'Asian' and 'Black' in American racial schemes."¹⁴ Gualtieri shows the perilous side of Syrian racial marginality by narrating the lynching of shopkeeper Nola Romey, in northern Florida, on May 17, 1929. Gualtieri's study is one of a very few that examines the experiences and identities of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Syrian immigrants in the American South.

Likewise, Arab Americans rarely appear in Western contexts. Studies of Arab Americans focus primarily on the northeast and particularly on Greater Detroit, where the heaviest concentrations of Arab Americans reside. A century ago, Syrian immigrants typically settled in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, and these demographics are reflected in the literature. But, like so many immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States, Syrians also struck trails to the West through the process of step migration; still others entered and settled in the West

¹⁴ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 4.

through Mexico and Central and South America.¹⁵ Yet, with the exception of several community studies,¹⁶ relatively few works examine Arab American individuals and communities in the Western United States, and none have dealt with Arabs in the region as a whole.¹⁷

From the birth of the field until today, the history of the American West has centered on conquest and colonialism. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to a meeting of historians at the World’s Columbian Exposition, a celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ landfall in the Americas. In his address, Turner argued that westward expansion was the most important factor in American history. He wrote: Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of a free area of land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development.¹⁸

¹⁵ Sarah Gualtieri, “Syrian Immigrants and Debates on Racial Belonging in Los Angeles, 1875-1945,” *Syrian Studies Newsletter*, 15.1 (Winter 2009-10): 2.

¹⁶ See William C. Sherman, *Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota* (Bismarck: University of Mary Press, 2002); Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The Syrian and Lebanese Texans* (San Antonio: University of Texas Press, 1974); Elizabeth Boosahda, *Arab-American Faces and Voices: The Origins of an Immigrant Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Sarah Gualtieri, “Syrian Immigrants and Debates on Racial Belonging in Los Angeles, 1875-1945,” *Syrian Studies Newsletter*, 15.1 (Winter 2009-10): 2.

¹⁷ Some important recent works include: Edward E. Curtis IV’s forthcoming monograph from NYU Press, *Heartland Muslim*, on Arab Muslim communities in the Midwest, and Sarah Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894).

Turner's theory racialized American expansionism and exceptionalism, conceiving of the frontier as the westward moving boundary between Indian savagery and Anglo American civilization. He also viewed the West as "unsettled," ignoring, as most did, Indigenous sovereignty over lands Americans coveted. He saw the formation of rugged individualism and democracy in the transformation of the wilderness into modern communities and institutions. Turner's West was not simply a place but a transformative process in which the wilderness became the United States and Europeans became Americans. In its own way, Turner's "frontier thesis" is itself an American assimilation narrative. Turner marked the year 1890 as the "closing of the frontier," a watershed that he clearly lamented.

After nearly a century, Turner's influential thesis lost ground to a new generation of Western historians. Patricia Nelson Limerick's path-breaking synthesis *The Legacy of Conquest* viewed the Western frontier not as a process, but as a place of conquest, challenging important aspects of Turner's Anglo-centric narrative.¹⁹ Limerick emphasized historical continuities linking the region's past and present, rejecting Turner's 1890 rupture. Limerick and others complicated Turner's progressive evolutionary narrative with complex histories of diverse groups competing for property and economic and cultural control. While Turner lamented the closing of a glorious and formative frontier period, Limerick showed a morally troubling side of Western history that shattered the myth of innocent pioneer victimry—a history that has never really come to a close.

¹⁹ See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987); Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Clyde Milner II and Charles E. Ranking, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

One of the most important insights of the “New Western History” was the recognition of the racial and ethnic diversity of the region, a characteristic that sets it apart from the rest of the nation. While regional histories of the nineteenth century North and South focused primarily on European ethnics on the one hand and Black/White dynamics on the other, the American West was a meeting ground for Mexicans, African Americans, East, South and West Asians, and European ethnics of all stripes, and contained a majority of the nation’s American Indian reservations. In terms of race, Limerick quipped, “the West could make the turn-of-the-century Northeastern urban confrontation between European immigrants and American nativists look like a family reunion.”²⁰ In 1986, Richard White wrote that Western historians of race “may have provided, without fully intending to do so, a new basis for the cherished Western pretensions to distinctiveness which otherwise seem doomed to crumble. [And] one of the few possible foundations on which to base Western regionalism.”²¹ Since then, an expansive Western literature on race, ethnicity, and identity formation has developed in the fields of Western immigration history and Ethnic Studies.²² These histories do not

²⁰ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

²¹ Richard White, “Race Relations in the American West,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986), 396.

²² A few from this expansive literature on race and ethnicity in the American West include, for example, Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998); Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Valerie Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Mariel Aquino, “The Indians of Europe in America:

assume ethnicity, race, and racial hierarchy as natural or biological, but as historically and geographically contingent.

Like the New Western historians, I view the American West as a place of conquest, and I also understand the region as part of an enduring colonial structure of which racial hierarchy has always been a critical part. United States colonialism is settler colonialism, which is first and foremost a contest over land in which the colonizing government and society aim to “eliminate and replace” Indigenous peoples, nations, and cultures with their own.²³ The goal of Indigenous erasure often, as in the case of the United States, leads to the normalization genocidal practices. As Turner recognized, democracy was (and remains) central to United States colonialism. But where Turner envisioned democracy’s birth on the rugged frontier line, it was in reality democracy that stoked expansionism like gasoline on a Western wildfire, because *citizens are primary agents of settler colonialism*. As I argue in this dissertation, White racial citizenship—access to property and the levers of political power—transforms immigrants into settlers. White racial identity promised, but has not always delivered, the keys to the kingdom. In recent years, historians have begun to reckon with the varied roles immigrants, Black people, and people of color have played in U.S. colonial projects.²⁴ “The Other Settlers”

Basque Narratives of Identity in the American West, 1870-2020,” PhD. Diss, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2020; Borderlands historians have added significantly to this topic: See among others, James F. Brooks *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Catherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²³ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006), 387-409. See also Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁴ Regarding Black people and people of color, see: Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura, eds. *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life*

shows parts that Arab Americans have played, and the structural positions they inhabited in doing so. In particular, “The Other Settlers” highlights the privilege legal Whiteness conferred. But Arab Americans have never been unproblematically White. The title speaks directly to this tension—legally-designated “Caucasian,” Arab Americans have, in some ways, reaped the “wages of Whiteness;” Arab Americans, nevertheless, remain as Others.

The ethnoracial diversity of the American West provides a rich backdrop from which Arab racialization and racial in-betweenness can be understood. The West makes a relational analysis of Arab Americans and race possible. In their recent anthology *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice*, Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and Ramón Gutiérrez point out that racialization and racial formation occur not only in relation to Whites and Whiteness, but in relation to other marginalized groups. A relational approach, they write, “can make visible the connections [and divisions] among such subordinated groups and the logic that underpins the forms of inclusion and dispossession they face.”²⁵ I therefore assess Arab American racialization and identity formation in terms of the racial landscapes Arab Americans inhabited—

in Hawaii, Tiya Miles, “Beyond a Boundary: Black Lives and the Native/Settler Divide,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Stephanie E. Smallwood, “Reflections on Settler Colonialism, the Hemispheric Americas, and Chattel Slavery,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, No. 3 (July 2019), 407-416. On White ethnics, see: Karen Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains*; Mikel Eckstrom, “Probationary Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in the American West: American Jews and American Indians, 1850-1934.”

²⁵ Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, Ramón A. Gutiérrez, eds, *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 2.

alongside East Asians, Mexican Americans, African Americans, Southern Europeans, and American Indians.

“The Other Settlers” is organized chronologically in three parts and five chapters. Part One, “Shapeshifters,” narrates two stories of ethnoracial transformation in the desert Southwest. Chapter One, “Between Arab and Black,” examines ethnic group memories of the sixteenth century Moroccan slave Esteban, who was taken to North America on the ill-fated Narvaez expedition. Esteban, Cabeza de Vaca, and two other Spaniards shipwrecked and famously trekked from Florida to Mexico City over the course of nearly a decade. Sold upon arrival at Mexico City, in 1538, Esteban was ordered to find the elusive cities of Cibola. He was reportedly killed at the Zuni village of Hawikku, in present-day New Mexico. For more than century, Pueblo Indians, African Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans have all remembered or claimed Esteban in different ways. At one time, Zunis reportedly remembered Esteban as a Black Mexican invader from the south, and later, as the kachina monster Chakwaina, recognizable by the black color of his skin. By contrast, African Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans have all celebrated and claimed Esteban’s story and legacy in struggles for civil rights and inclusion.

While Chapter One explores Esteban’s contested identity in historical memory, Chapter Two, “Beasts of Burden,” examines the multiple identities of Hadji Ali, a camel driver for the U.S. Army, inhabited throughout his lifetime. Hadji Ali was also known as Hi Jolly, Phillipou Teodora, Phillip Tedro, and Félipe Tedro. In mid-nineteenth century Ottoman Smyrna, Phillipou Teodora converted from Orthodox Christianity to Islam, becoming Hadji Ali. Recruited by the U.S. Army in 1856 as part of the Camel Corps

experiment, soldiers and officers called him “Hi Jolly,” the Turk. He also claimed Greek and Arab ethnic identities throughout the course of his colorful life. His story of immigration and ethnic transformation—what Paul Spickard calls “shapeshifting”—highlights both the challenges and opportunities of ethnoracial ambiguity in the context of the mid-nineteenth century Southwest. In Part One, and throughout this dissertation, naming and re-naming indicate significant moments of identity transformation.

Part Two, “Immigrants and Settlers,” consists of two chapters that center on United States immigration policy and land policy. In sum, these chapters examine both the racial and physical obstacles Syrian immigrants faced on their immigration and naturalization journeys. Chapter Three, “Trails and Fences,” shows how racialized immigration restrictions targeted Syrians, profoundly altering migration patterns for thousands of immigrants. I trace the restrictions that aimed to bar them, and also their labyrinthine journeys to the United States through Mexico. Although Syrians were not explicitly barred from entry—as were Chinese and later Japanese laborers—in practice, Syrians were excluded as contract laborers, paupers, and carriers of contagious diseases, categories that were then powerful codes for racialization and exclusion. Before Syrian Whiteness was adjudicated and affirmed in the courts, in the realm of immigration law many Syrians were deemed ineligible for entry onto American soil and into the American body politic. In response, migration networks linking the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe and the Americas diverted Syrian immigrants from Ellis Island to Veracruz, Mexico, where, alongside other excluded Asian immigrants, Syrians made their crossings over the U.S.-Mexico border. It is an American immigration story strikingly different from the Ellis Island narrative.

Chapter Four, “Whiteness as Property,” shows how Syrian immigrants became White settlers. I highlight the interrelatedness of race, citizenship, and property rights, as immigrants “ineligible for citizenship” were also ineligible to making homestead claims. Thus when, in 1909, the newly created U.S. Naturalization Bureau attempted to bar Syrians from citizenship, it also threatened their access to the homestead privilege. Like disease, contract labor, and pauperism in U.S. immigration law, “ineligible for citizenship” was a racial code for exclusion from homesteading and, in some states, property ownership generally. When George Dow won his case, cementing Syrians’ legal status as “free White persons,” their access to homesteads and White settler status was finally secure.

Part Three, “Reckoning,” recounts the stories of two generations of the Abourezk family in South Dakota. It begins with a prologue, describing the immigration story of Bishara “Charlie” Abourezk, who immigrated to South Dakota in 1898 as a homesteader alongside his two brothers. Like many Syrian immigrants, Charlie’s business shifted from itinerant peddling to a “brick and mortar” business; he opened a mercantile on Rosebud Sioux Reservation, raising his family there. Enmeshed in local politics, his son, James George Abourezk, won a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1973. That same year, South Dakota and the nation were rocked by Red Power protests demanding justice for American Indians. His experiences growing up on the Rosebud shaped his response to the crisis—an attempt to remake federal Indian policy with the goal of ameliorating centuries of abuse and oppression. As an ally, Abourezk used his privilege as a United States senator to sponsor legislation written for and by American Indians. Like many of the Western histories I recount, Abourezk’s story is no celebratory tale of triumph, many of his and

others' efforts toward the systemic reform of federal Indian policy failed. But it is a story of how one man reckoned with his privilege, and his country's colonial past and present. Frustrated with the corrupt insider politics of Congress, Abourezk retired from the Senate, founded the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and became a vocal critic of American foreign policy in the Middle East, especially with regard to Israel-Palestine.

It is my hope that stories of Arabs as explorers, scouts, settlers, and a senator will highlight tensions *within* Arab American identity. For more than a century, Arab identity in the United States and abroad has largely coalesced around an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle for self-determination in the homeland. As recent studies of twentieth century Arab American political activism by Salim Yaqub, Pamela Pennock, and Hani Bawardi have shown, Arab American identity and activism has centered on the Palestinian struggle against Israeli settler colonialism for nearly a century.²⁶ Thus deep and seemingly irreconcilable tensions strain the “Arab” and “American” facets of our identities. Locating Arabs in the West makes claims on American identity, and explores Arab positioning within it, but it also forces a more intimate reckoning with our complicated in-between status, simultaneously subjects and objects, natives and settlers, Arabs and Americans.

²⁶ See Hani Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); and Pamela Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight Against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

PART ONE: SHAPESHIFTERS

**CHAPTER ONE: BETWEEN ARAB AND BLACK: ZAMMOURI, RACE, AND
BELONGING**



Figure 1 Bust of Zammouri by John Sherrill Houser, *Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society* (Dearborn, Michigan: Arab American National Museum, 2009), 4.

In 1538, a Black North African man flanked by two Castilian greyhounds approached the Zuni pueblo of Hawikku, in what is now New Mexico. Bells and feathers adorned his wrists and ankles, and he carried a gourd rattle decorated in the same way, ringing and clattering as he moved, stridently announcing his presence without words. He traveled in the company of more than three hundred Native people, on a Spanish mission of conquest

and conversion. Who he was and what actually occurred after his entrance into the Zuni pueblo remains shrouded in the dark reaches of the past, illuminated by the storyteller's dim and filtered lamplight. Nearly five centuries later, the same man was immortalized in a bronze bust cast by American sculptor John Sherrill Houser, whose father helped to carve Mount Rushmore from the towering granite face of the Black Hills. Houser's bust depicts a young, smooth-skinned man wearing a buffalo robe, with full lips, densely textured hair, and a single feather standing upright at his crown. The bronze patina suggests a dusky brown skin tone. Like other figures we will encounter in this story, he is dressed as an Indian. An image of Houser's bust appears in a publication by the Arab American National Museum (AANM), in Dearborn, Michigan; the caption reads, "Bust of Zammouri, a slave from Morocco thought to be the first Arab to land in North America."¹ When I encountered Zammouri, the "first Arab American," I knew I had found the opening chapter of this dissertation.

But Zammouri's identity as an Arab is far more complicated than I could have imagined. Zammouri is commonly known as Esteban the Black, or Esteban the Moor, but at one time Zunis remembered him as a Black Mexican, and other Puebloans say he is embodied in the kachina monster Chakwaina. So this is a story about how Esteban the Black, enslaved by a Spanish conquistador, transformed from, in Cabeza de Vaca's words, "*es negro alarabe, natural de Azamor*," to a Black Mexican, a kachina monster, the first African American, and finally to Zammouri, the first Arab American. It is a story about how race and memory are made, inhabited, and contested in context. From the

¹ *Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society* (Dearborn, Michigan: Arab American National Museum, 2009), 4.

sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Esteban's race was remembered in the contexts of Spanish and United States colonialism; in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, African Americans and Arab Americans reimagined Esteban in struggles for civil rights and inclusion.

What we know of Esteban comes from several Spanish accounts of a failed effort to colonize Florida, and to a later expedition to find the legendary cities of Cibola.² In 1527, Esteban accompanied his enslaver Andres Dorantes on the ill-fated Narváez expedition, a disastrous endeavor that forced them, along with Alonso del Castillo Maldonado and Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, on a treacherous overland journey. After eight long years trekking from present day Florida to Mexico City, Dorantes sold Esteban to New Spain's Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza. In 1538, Mendoza sent Esteban northward into present-day Arizona and New Mexico with the priest Fray Marcos de Niza to find rumored cities of gold. Mystery surrounds Esteban's fate upon arriving at Hawikku, but several witnesses reported his death at the hands of Zuni warriors.

Esteban's story is a contact narrative, and the power of contact narratives lies in their originary claims—the first explorer, first contact between Zunis and non-Natives. These kinds of stories are central to American history, memory, and identity. John Sutton Lutz has written that for settler peoples, [contact stories] are origin stories, the explanation of how the immigrants got 'here,' and...the opening paragraph of a long rationale for displacing

² Dedra McDonald, "Intimacy and Empire: Indian-African Interaction in Spanish Colonial New Mexico, 1500-1800," *American Indian Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1998), 134.

[I]ndigenous peoples. For [I]ndigenous people, they are a prologue to the process in which their world was turned upside down.³

Lutz's analysis is framed around Europeans and Indigenous peoples. As an enslaved Moroccan, Esteban's story and legacy are different; he inhabits a space on the border, neither European nor Indian, both colonizer and colonized, simultaneously a casualty and an agent of empire. If for European Americans, stories of arrival and contact provided the rationale for colonialism, African American and Arab American claims to Esteban's story emerged in demands for integration and inclusion. But, if Esteban appears as the protagonist in Arab American and African American narratives, he looks very different from the Native side of conquest.

Nearly a century before English settlers' "First Encounter" on Cape Cod, Spain launched the Narváez expedition to establish colonies in North America.⁴ Still, American national memory tends to conceive of arrival and contact in purely Anglo terms, in stories of beleaguered Puritans and hospitable Indians.⁵ Such Anglo-centric narratives draw tight racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries around American identity. This American identity

³ John Sutton Lutz, ed., *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

⁴ See, for example, Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). Alan Taylor complicates the settling of North America, transcending Anglo-centric narratives that cling tightly to the north Atlantic seaboard. Taylor juxtaposes Anglo, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Russian colonization efforts, taking into account the vast expanse of what is today the United States.

⁵ For example, Walter L. Hixton's *American Settler Colonialism* traces the Anglo-American narrative, beginning with the thirteen British colonies' separation from the mother country in the American Revolution.

fashioned a new definition of the “native” American as the Anglo-European colonist.⁶

Arab American narratives of arrival and contact claim an American heritage and identity for themselves.

Iberian Colonialism, Slavery, & Blackness

Slavery is at the center of this colonial narrative. Esteban was most likely enslaved by Portuguese or Spanish slave traders or corsairs in the early sixteenth century. Slavery existed in the Iberian peninsula as far back as recorded history, and continued through successive conquests: Roman, Visigoth, and Muslim, and into the fifteenth century *reconquista*. In the early sixteenth century, when Esteban was enslaved, the institution existed throughout the Mediterranean; but unlike slavery in the colonial Caribbean or in the antebellum United States, these were “societies with slaves,” not “slave societies.”⁷ Slavery was a dynamic institution that crossed religious, ethnic, and racial divides. In the words of William D. Phillips, Iberian slavery was “cross cultural and multi-ethnic Christians, Jews, and Muslims could be slave dealers, slave owners, or the enslaved, depending on circumstance.”⁸ In the Late Medieval period, raiders from both sides of the religious divide—Christian and Muslim—preyed on coastal populations of Southern Iberia and North Africa, where Esteban was taken from Azemmour, Morocco. Azemmour emerged as a hub of the Portuguese slave trade, an embarkation point from which North African slaves were shipped to Europe and the Americas.

⁶ See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

⁷ William D. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Slaves sold in Spain were ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the origins of slaves sold in Spain traced multiple trade routes, including the Philippines, Canary Islands, the Americas, Portuguese India, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and North Africa. North African slaves included ethnic Arabs, Berbers, and Jews from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.⁹ Aurelia Martín Casares, who has studied the diverse origins of slaves sold in Spain during the late Middle Ages and Early Modern periods, writes that the presence of North African slaves in Spain was a result of “violence perpetrated by Christians, either at sea or on land, in the context of traditional military Islam-Christianity confrontation.”¹⁰ From the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, Muslim Maghrebians represented the largest populations of slaves imported at all times into Spain; North African Jews were present in Spain, but not in significant numbers.¹¹ Terms used to describe North African slaves included *Berberiscos* and *Moros* (which denoted Muslim identity). Berber slaves made up a significant number of North African slaves in Spain, and scribes sometimes used the term “*Alarabes*,” a term which Cabeza de Vaca used to describe Esteban, to distinguish between Berber and Arab slaves.¹² While Esteban’s identity as an Arab has been a significant point of contention, “*alarabe*” was a term that Spaniards specifically used to denote Arab ethnic identity among sixteenth century North African slaves. The Spanish also used phenotype to

⁹ Aurelia Martín Casares, “Evolution of the Origin of Slaves Sold in Spain from the Late Middle Ages till the 18th Century,” in *Serfdom and Slavery in the European Economy: 11th-18th Centuries*, edited by Simonetta Cavaciocci (Florence, Italy: Firenze University Press, 2014), 414.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 419.

¹² *Ibid.*

describe North African slaves, including White, Black, Mulatto, *Loro* (between Black and White, meaning “nearly ripened wheat”), and *Membrillo Cocho* (meaning the color of “cooked quince”).¹³

Early modern European ideas about Blackness were, in part, rooted in the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century. Although fair and dark-complected peoples were enslaved in the Islamic World, by the ninth century, distinctions were drawn between them, and Black slaves performed the most menial forms of labor.¹⁴ Until today, the Arabic word for slave or slaves, *abd* or *abid*, refers to black-skinned peoples. According to James H. Sweet, ideas about race “were firmly entrenched before Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Americas,” and these ideas conflated what are now the separate categories of “culture” and “race.”¹⁵ Early modern Europeans viewed what they imagined to be inferior cultures as inferior races, often linking culture to phenotype, and especially to skin color. “In Iberia, once the traits of the infidel and the slave became associated with [B]lackness, race became the driving force in the formulation of Spanish and Portuguese attitudes toward sub-Saharan Africans.”¹⁶ In the sixteenth century, the English adopted these attitudes, and the word “*negro*” to describe Black Africans; according to Winthrop Jordan, “The term negro itself was incorporated into English from the Hispanic languages in mid-sixteenth century and mulatto a half

¹³ *Ibid.*, 420.

¹⁴ James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 145.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

century later. This is the more striking because a perfectly adequate term, identical in meaning to negro, already existed in English.”¹⁷ Spaniards, Portuguese, and later English conquerors and colonists carried African slaves and color-conscious habits of mind with them to the Americas.

The Narváez Expedition

Esteban accompanied his enslaver Andres Dorantes on the Narváez expedition, which set out to conquer and settle the vast expanse stretching from Florida to the Rio de las Palmas on the gulf coast of New Spain. Cabeza de Vaca memorialized the Odyssean expedition in his 1542 *La Relación*. The expedition set sail from Sanlúcar de Borromea, Spain in 1527, the same port from which both Ferdinand Magellan and Christopher Columbus launched their historic voyages. But Narváez’s expedition is remembered more for its historic failure, and for the harrowing tale of the survivors who eventually made it to New Spain, just four of the three hundred souls who first arrived at Tampa Bay in 1528.¹⁸ As Cabeza de Vaca described their journey, the men confronted tempests; unforgiving alien landscapes; Indigenous groups who aided, attacked, and enslaved them; and hunger, thirst, and deadly exposure. Between 1529 and 1536, the men cheated death by learning Native languages and by fashioning themselves as shamans. While all four men impersonated healers and learned indigenous languages, Esteban served as the Spaniards’ translator, guide, and scout. Cabeza de Vaca remarked that the Europeans rarely communicated with Native peoples, using social distance to reinforce their

¹⁷ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 61.

¹⁸ Lope de Oviedo was the only other survivor, but he did not make the trek to New Spain with the other four.

authority.¹⁹ In Cabeza de Vaca's words, "it was the negro who talked to them [the Indians] all the time; he inquired about the road we should follow, the villages—in short, about everything we wished to know."²⁰ His role as mediator separated Esteban from his Castilian counterparts, but it also placed him in a precarious position in between the Europeans and the Indians. In this way, the small company staggered toward Mexico.

The four men were transformed over the course their journey. Much like Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier hero, in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative the men were stripped of their European clothing and arms, donning the trappings and walking the trails of the Indians. In another common trope of colonial narratives, the colonizer literally and/or figuratively "becomes" an Indian, transforming himself from stranger, outsider, and interloper through narratives, dress, performative, and reproductive acts.²¹ As Anne McClintock has pointed out, [h]aving sailed beyond the limits of their charted seas, explorers enter...a liminal condition...eluding "the network of classifications that normally locate states and

¹⁹ Adorno, Rolena, and Patrick Charles Pautz, *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca : His Account, His Life and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 419.

²⁰ Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Fanny Bandelier, trans. *The Journey of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and his Companions from Florida to the Pacific, 1528-1536* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1905), 158.

²¹ See Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

positions in cultural space." There on the margins between the known and unknown, explorers and sailors become creatures of transition and threshold.²²

Existing outside of their own and Indigenous norms, these marginal figures posed a danger to both societies. Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* ends with himself, Dorantes, and Castillo shipboard and headed back to Spain, closing the circle of their protracted journey to the Americas, where only Esteban remained.

In Search of Cibola

Sold to the Viceroy of New Spain for a new expedition with Fray Marcos de Niza, Esteban led the priest in search of souls to save and the legendary wealth of Cibola. Esteban trekked ahead of Fray Marcos with a group of more than three hundred Indigenous men and women. Twelve days later, an Indian from that party told Fray Marcos of Esteban's death. He reported that Esteban sent the Zunis a gourd rattle decorated with two feathers, one red and one white, which symbolized Esteban's religious authority.²³ When a Zuni cacique saw the rattle, he hurled it to the ground, expelling the messengers and warning them not to enter the village. Esteban flouted the cacique's warning. The last time the messenger saw him, Zuni warriors were chasing Esteban from the village in a shower of arrows.

Coronado, Hernando de Alarcón, and Pedro de Castañeda also related details of Esteban's untimely demise. According to Castañeda, Esteban wanted the glory of

²² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 24-45.

²³ A calabash is a type of gourd and a cascabel is a rattlesnake rattle. Esteban and the three Spaniards received these symbols and learned their significance on their journey through Texas.

discovery for himself, demanded turquoises and women, and told the Zunis that “[W]hite men...were coming.”²⁴ According to Alarcon, Esteban told the Zunis that his brothers were heavily armed and not far behind, so the Zunis killed him, tore his body to pieces, and distributed them among the chieftains to make certain he was dead.²⁵ The Indians of Chichilticale, a pueblo on the trail to Cibola, told Coronado that Esteban was “a bad man” whom the Zunis killed “because he assaulted their women.”²⁶

According to their accounts, race figured prominently the exchanges between Esteban, the conquistadores, and the Indians, which emphasized Esteban’s sameness to and difference from the Spaniards. In Alarcon’s narrative, Esteban was “like us [the Spaniards]” but a “negro.” In another, Esteban referred to the Spaniards as his “brothers,” but in yet another, they were “[W]hites.” In Castañeda’s narrative, the Zunis reckoned that Black and White men could not be of the same people. As the Spaniards reported, the categories of Black and White are evident in these Spanish-Zuni exchanges.

As much as somatic differences marked these accounts, the Spanish narratives suggest that Esteban’s intents and actions aligned with those of the Spaniards—the proverbial three Gs—gold, God, and glory. Taken together, they also tell the story of a slave who challenged his place. Esteban sought the fame and honor of discovery. He opened the way for Christianity, raising crosses, and paving the way for the priests’ mission of conversion. Esteban appropriated material wealth from the Indians he encountered. If the theft of natural resources and territory were primary aims of Spanish

²⁴ Cabeza de Vaca, Bandelier, trans., *The Journey*, 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

colonialism in the Americas, so too was the seizure of bodies. While the problem of Indian slavery preoccupied the Spanish Crown, sexual violence against Indigenous women was yet another brutal and pervasive colonial practice, one in which these eyewitness accounts say Esteban engaged. The Spanish narratives reveal Esteban's dual identity as both colonizer and colonized, a man who in some ways resisted the subjugation of his station as a slave, but who served as an agent of the Spanish empire nonetheless.

During his 1540-1542 expedition from Mexico to the American Southwest, Coronado reached the Zuni pueblo of Hawikku hoping to find Fray Marcos' fabled city of Cibola. When the Zunis refused him entry as they had Esteban, Coronado and his men violently occupied the village. Coronado wrote of a Zuni prophesy; it was foretold that strangers would come from the direction that the Spaniards had come, and that the whole country would be conquered by them.²⁷ The prophesy proved true twice; the second time, the colonizers came from a different direction.

Black Mexicans, White Men, & Kachina Monsters

On a hot summer day in 1879, a young ethnologist named Frank Hamilton Cushing sat in his office in the old South Tower of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., when he was called into his mentor's office. Spencer F. Baird, the first curator of the museum, offered his young protégé an opportunity that would change the course of the young man's life. He offered to send Cushing on a three-month "collecting party" in New Mexico, to study a "typical tribe of Pueblo Indians."²⁸ Like Spanish conquest, the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁸ Jesse Green, ed., *Cushing at Zuni: The Correspondence and Journals of Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1879-1884* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 2-3.

U.S. conquest of northern Mexico was followed by a period of systematic mapping and surveying, “discovering,” and commandeering the exploitable plant, animal, and mineral resources of the region. Throughout the nineteenth century, the myth of the vanishing Indian ostensibly demonstrated the inexorable “progress” of White civilization over savagery. The vanishing Indian myth at once celebrated, lamented, and romanticized the elimination of Indigenous societies.

Cushing’s expedition aimed to “study, while still possible, ‘our North American Indians in their primitive conditions,’ to record their customs and oral traditions, and to salvage as much information and material evidence as possible.”²⁹ Late nineteenth-century Victorian anthropologists viewed human societies on a linear path progressing in stages from savagery to barbarism to civilization. In these scientists’ minds, observing Indigenous societies was like glimpsing their own “primitive” pasts—witnessing their own civilizational origins. While others combed the American West for material resources to exploit, ethnologists, archaeologists, and anthropologists searched for cultural wealth to appropriate and preserve.³⁰

Appropriating Indian identity was part of this project.³¹ Cushing famously (or infamously) “went native” during his ethnographic field research. Cushing lived among the Zunis for four and a half years, wore their clothes, spoke their language, entered a prestigious warrior society, and was adopted into the governor’s family.³² His

²⁹ Green, ed., *Cushing at Zuni*, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

³² Green, ed., *Cushing at Zuni*, 4.

transformation on the fringes of American empire resonates with those of Esteban, Cabeza de Vaca, and their compatriots as they wandered the periphery of New Spain.



Figure 2 Frank Hamilton Cushing in Native Dress

Cushing and the rest of the Americans from the Bureau of Ethnology traveled on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad to its terminus at Las Vegas, and then rode mule-back into western New Mexico. On September 19, 1879, they set up their camp on

a plain outside of the Zuni pueblo.³³ Cushing studied Zuni history and tradition and the old Spanish narratives, drawing connections between the two.

In 1882, Cushing told famed geologist and explorer John Wesley Powell that he learned the significance of the ruin of Kia-ki-me, at the base of Thunder Mountain, a fortified mesa about three miles east of Zuni. According to Cushing, the site related to the story of the “‘Black Mexican with thick lips,’ in whom [he] failed not to recognize the Barbary Negro [Esteban].”³⁴ According to the story, in the time of the Zunis’ ancestors, Black Mexicans emerged from Hemlock Canyon from their abodes in the Everlasting Summerland, and descended on Kiä-ki-me. They came with a party of Indians of Sonora carrying war feathers, long bows, and cane arrows. The Zuni ancients killed one of the Black Mexicans, and the Sonoran Indians were chased out of the village. But the killing of the Black Mexicans did not assuage the Zunis’ anxieties surrounding the strangers, they feared that the strangers would soon return. And they did. By and by they did come back those [B]lack Mexicans, and with them many men of [Sonora]. They wore coats of iron and...bonnets of metal and carried...short canes that spit fire and made thunder. Thus it was in the days of Kiä-ki-me.³⁵

Cushing believed that the Zuni story of the Black Mexicans recounted the Zunis’ first contact with Esteban and the Spanish conquistadors. Cushing pointed out the corroborating detail of a red feather prominently displayed on Esteban’s gourd rattle, a

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

Zuni symbol of violence. Cushing also noted the racial dimension of the encounter, remarking that it was the Zunis' first meeting with a Black man. In Cushing's narrative, Esteban was also a Mexican, which reflected racial dynamics and categories created during the period of Spanish and Mexican rule in the Southwest. According to the Zuni story, the conquerors were Black Mexicans. Coronado's company traveled with many Black Africans through Arizona and New Mexico, as did Alarcon's contingent.³⁶ Jack D. Forbes points out that these Africans "became the first non-Indian settlers in New Mexico."³⁷

The Spanish and later Mexican governments that tenuously controlled the Southwest aimed to convert American Indians into Catholics and laborers, forging hybrid, creole communities in their wake. Mexican identity, like the Spanish colonial *castas* that preceded it, are *mestizaje* identities forged in intimate, often violent colonial encounters among Spanish settlers, Indians, and Africans over centuries. Dedra McDonald's study of Indian-African encounters in colonial New Mexico shows the historical depth of these contacts in the Spanish borderlands, beginning with the story of Esteban.³⁸ She writes that since the earliest settlement, the "Spanish system of racial stratification and coerced labor placed Africans and Indians in a context of deep cultural contact."³⁹ But the specter of race mixing in this color conscious colonial society so

³⁶ Jack D. Forbes, "Black Pioneers: The Spanish-Speaking Afro-Americans of the Southwest," in Miriam Jimenez and Juan Flores, eds., *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See James F. Brooks, "Confounding the Color Line: Indian-Black Relations in Historical and Anthropological Perspective," *American Indian Quarterly* 22, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 1998): 125-133, and McDonald, "Intimacy and Empire."

³⁹ Dedra McDonald, "Intimacy and Empire," 136.

threatened racial purity, *limpieza de sangre*, that “Indians and Europeans alike suppressed memories and evidence of Black forbears.⁴⁰ In *Reconquista* Spain, *limpieza de sangre* referred to the taint of Muslim or Jewish ancestry, but it later applied to the hybrid *castas* of the Americas.



Figure 3 Unknown artist, *Castas* Painting, ca. 1750, from Ilona Katzew, *Casta Paintings: Images of Race in Eighteenth Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 36.

⁴⁰ Brooks, “Confounding the Color Line,” 127.

The United States colonial project created fewer and starker racial categories, at once denying the existence of mixed-race Blacks with the “one drop rule,” and insisting that indigeneity was compromised by race mixing. In the logic of U.S. colonialism, Indians could become “half breeds” and vanish into Whiteness, while Black people could never in theory dilute their color, although many did in practice.⁴¹ United States colonialism, unlike European colonialism in Africa or Spanish colonialism in the Americas, did not rely on the expropriation of Native labor to extract the natural resources of the regions they colonized. Rather, the U.S. government aimed to eliminate Indigenous societies to replace them with European settlers, colonized and enslaved Africans, and racialized immigrant laborers, all of whom would occupy and transform Indigenous lands.⁴² The polarity of the Black and Indian racial categories facilitated the elimination of American Indians, the maintenance of racialized slavery, and White supremacy.

For Zunis over a century later, Esteban was no portent of Black Mexican conquerors, but a harbinger of the coming of the “White man,” a term synonymous with Euroamerican conquest. Edmund J. Ladd, a Zuni anthropologist, refuted Cushing’s account, narrating the encounter from the Zuni point of view. Ladd wrote, “The first ‘[W]hite man’ who visited us was a Moor.”⁴³ In his version of the story, news of the

⁴¹ See Winthrop D. Jordan and Paul Spickard, “Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States,” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/C811013867>.

⁴² See Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” and Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*.

⁴³ Edmund J. Ladd, “Zuni on the Day the Men in Metal Arrived,” in *The Coronado Expedition to Tierra Nueva: The 1540–1542 Route Across the Southwest*, edited by Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint (Louisville, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1997), 188.

White man's depredations in the south arrived at Hawikku well before Esteban set foot in the Zuni pueblo. Travelling Indian traders from the south told the Zunis tales of cruel, vicious, and greedy White men who killed for shiny yellow stones and brutally killed and enslaved Indians.

Ladd illustrated the scene at Hawikku on that fateful day in 1539. It was a warm spring afternoon, and the Zunis were readying themselves for the spring planting when out on the horizon appeared a cloud of dust surrounding a group of people led by a tall, imposing figure dressed in flamboyant clothing. After spotting the strangers, a priest called a council to meet them. Using sign language, the Zunis and the strangers came to an understanding, and the visitors were housed in a large dwelling outside of the village. In Ladd's rendering, Esteban made several fateful mistakes: making demands of the Zunis, delivering the gourd rattle, and telling of the coming of White men. In the beginning, the Zunis were friendly, but soon Esteban demanded food, gifts, and women. When the Zunis refused, Esteban sent a "medicine rattle" to demonstrate his spiritual powers. The war chief threw the rattle to the ground and the council summoned Esteban, who made the deadly error of announcing the coming of White men. According to Ladd, "He was not killed because he was [B]lack, not because of his demands, but because he was 'leading [W]hite men more powerful than himself.'"⁴⁴ In Ladd's rendering, Esteban is a sympathetic figure, who was killed not because of his race, but because he spoke of the true colonizers—White men. Esteban made mistakes; he *was* human after all.

But for some Pueblo Indians, the trauma of his arrival pushed Esteban over the threshold from man to monster—from the realm of the physical and historical into the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

cosmological. Esteban continues to inhabit space in Zuni/Pueblo ritual practice as the Black kachina Chakwaina, a horrible ogre who haunts disobedient children.⁴⁵ The iconography of the Chakwaina ogre ties this spiritual being to the historical figure of Esteban. They typically have black faces, torso, and arms, wooly hair, crescent, bulging, or triangular eyes, no nose, jagged teeth, a hanging tongue, a beard, double bandoleers (bullet belts), and a bow and rattle, which resonate with descriptions of Esteban from the Spanish colonial narratives.⁴⁶ Anthropologist Frederick J. Dockstader has argued that folklore and hearsay support the notion that the Chakwaina Kachina represents Esteban, as “[t]he appearance of this Kachina and the fact that Chakwaina is known in all the pueblos as a horrible ogre, support this legend. Esteban would be remembered because of the color of his skin, because he was the first non-Indian seen in Cibola, and because of the circumstances surrounding his fate.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John Joseph McCarthy, “Chakwaina Kachina among the Hopi and Zuni: A Study in Form and Iconography,” (Master’s Thesis, Governor’s State University, 1991): 127.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.



Figure 4 Peter Shelton (Hopi), *Chakwaina Kachina*, 1970-1980, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Michigan.

Like the story of the Black Mexicans, anthropologists and ethnologists studying the Zuni and Hopi drew connections between Chakwaina Kachina and Esteban. Barton Wright, who studied Zuni kachinas extensively, categorically denies the connection.⁴⁸ Still, some Pueblo Indians validate the legend. Fred Kabootie, a prominent Hopi artist, “concluded that this katsina represents [Esteban].” He said, “Not all Hopis know that, but I know the history, and I came to my own conclusion.”⁴⁹ Kabootie said that Esteban was

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

killed because the Zunis did not approve of him; he did not die at once, he was wounded and his eyes rolled up and he moaned, explaining the unique crescent shape of Chakwaina's eyes, and the fact that he walks with a limp. Like the kachina, Esteban "had whiskers and he was [B]lack."⁵⁰ Although Pueblo Indians recorded Esteban's Blackness into their histories and cosmologies, for American historians his color has not always been a foregone conclusion.



Claiming Esteban

Figure 5 American Historian Rayford Wittingham Logan, n.d.

Rayford Wittingham Logan was born in Washington, D.C., on January 7, 1897, during the "nadir of American race relations," as he later characterized the era. His

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

mother was a laundress and his father, a butler for a prominent family. Although Logan was Black according to the law he lived on the racial margins, suspended uneasily between the binary designations of Black and White. He identified as an “American Negro,” a classification that, he believed, could encapsulate his racial identity in ways that the term “Black” never could; perhaps it was the term’s origins in the complex racial matrix of Spanish colonialism, which at least validated the identities of racially mixed peoples. Like many African Americans, Logan’s ancestry reflected the history of slavery and colonialism. In his own words, he was “forty-sixty-fourths or ten-sixteenths [W]hite, eight sixty-fourths or two-sixteenths [American] Indian, and sixteen-sixty fourths or four-sixteenths Negro.”⁵¹ Both Logan and his ginger-haired, blue-eyed brother could probably have lived as White men, but they did not. His racial identity originated in the history of slavery, White supremacy, and sexual violence against enslaved Black women. His maternal grandfather was born of a prominent White woman and a freeborn Black man, and both Logan and his mother expressed pride in their free Black and White origins. Less is known of Logan’s paternal ancestry, lost in the shadows of slavery; Logan once remarked on these stolen origins:

First, hundreds of thousands of Negroes in the United States, Latin America, and the colonial West Indies would be compelled to be equally vague in tracing their ancestry . . . [My grandmother] was the bed-companion, apparently, of whatever [W]hite man chose

⁵¹ Kenneth Robert Janke, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 4.

her. In brief, like many mulattoes today, I am a second generation bastard, a relic of the foul slave system that was one of the worst disgraces of American history.⁵²

If the history of slavery robbed Logan of a sense of his ancestry and origins, he made documenting the African American past his life's work. In his youth, he attended the segregated yet prestigious M Street High School, an incubator for a striving Black elite. Although society at large subscribed to the one drop rule, light skin was a mark of privilege within Washington's African American community. According to Kenneth Janken, Washington's Black aristocracy was defined by light complexion, family pedigree, and education. Logan possessed two of the three. In 1930, he enrolled at Harvard University's PhD Program in history. As an African American scholar, Logan's job opportunities were severely circumscribed. After graduating, Logan took a job with Carter G. Woodson, the father of African American history. While their pigment-rich complexions made African Americans a hyper-visible and stigmatized American minority, in the early twentieth century, the academy had rendered them virtually invisible. Woodson and Logan shared the view that history was a critical terrain for civil rights activism, and they endeavored to "[popularize] the centrality of [B]lack people to the history of the world."⁵³

In his capacity as Woodson's assistant at the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Logan published a biography of Esteban. He wrote the article in 1940, the year Americans celebrated the Coronado Cuarto Centennial, a commemoration of the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 84.

“first [W]hite man to traverse the American Southwest.” Logan’s article, “Estevanico, Negro Discoverer of the Southwest: A Critical Reexamination,” challenged the narrative of the Cuarto Centennial, noting that the four survivors of the Narvaez expedition might have passed through New Mexico, but “If they did not, [Esteban] was the sole discoverer.” He remarked wryly that this fact “is perhaps one of the reasons why the Southwest chose to commemorate...the *entrada* of Coronado rather than Fray Marco.”⁵⁴ More importantly, though, Logan argued that Esteban was Black.

Fastidious Harvard-educated historian that he was, Logan examined closely both the primary accounts and secondary literature describing Esteban’s race. The consensus among scholars by 1940 was that Esteban was a Moor (North African Arab). Logan examined the primary accounts to find that, “[i]n all of these sources and translations [Esteban] is referred to as a Negro.”⁵⁵ The only reference Logan found to confirm Esteban’s identity as a “Moor” was the closing line of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relacion*, where he described Esteban as “*es negro alárabe, natural de Azamor*,” which virtually all translators had rendered as “Arab.”⁵⁶ American translators and chroniclers Fanny Bandelier and Cleve Hallenbeck, Logan argued, refused to believe that Esteban could possibly be Black. Bandelier wrote that it was “not unlikely that he was not a negro proper but from one or the other of the tribes of the desert,” calling Esteban an “Arab Moor.” Hallenbeck noted that in Nuñez’s time “[*N*]egro” was applied to “people of

⁵⁴ Rayford W. Logan, “Estevanico, Negro Discoverer of the Southwest: A Critical Reexamination,” *Phylon* 1, no. 4 (1940): 306.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Hamitic and Malayan blood as well as to [N]egroes,” and that one account called Esteban “*moreno*” or “brown.” Logan rebuked Hallenbeck’s analysis saying, he ‘proves’ that *negro* does not mean Negro but a Moor by leaving out Cabeza de Vaca’s word *negro* in front of *alárabe*; he ‘proves’ that *negro* does not mean Negro by saying that other peoples were so designated; and he ‘proves’ finally that [Esteban] was not even [B]lack because, over against the repeated use of the word by many contemporaries, one man said that he was brown.⁵⁷

Logan laid bare the overwhelming evidence of Esteban’s Blackness against the single usage of the term “*alarabe*.” Reading his words, one can sense Logan’s frustration and disdain, venting as his fair-skinned fingers hit the keys of his typewriter, stringing together the letters that for him so decisively spelled out Esteban’s true racial identity.

Logan weighed in on the mystery of Esteban’s death at the hands of the Zuni. He affirmed Esteban’s death, but questioned the charge that he had assaulted Zuni women. This was a particularly fraught issue, as racial stereotypes of African American men as sexual predators undergirded White supremacy, segregation, and lynching. Coronado claimed that Esteban had been killed because he abused Indian women, unlike the Spanish Christians, a charge that Logan heartily debunked. In the end, Logan surmised that Esteban was killed because the Zunis feared him and the Spaniards who followed close behind. In closing, Logan defended Esteban’s Blackness, equality, and humanity: [Esteban] was a Negro in the North American sense of the word. He was as hardy as any of the Spaniards; he became a skilled medicine man; he was more intelligent than many

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

of the Spanish for he learned many Indian languages He was a modern ‘ambassador of good will.’ If his success caused him to overestimate his powers, he merely showed that he was essentially human.⁵⁸

Demanding Esteban’s Blackness and inclusion in American contact narratives challenged White American history, reflecting Logan’s aspirations of equality, recognition, and integration. African American history raised racial consciousness and racial pride, exploding the centuries-old myth of Black inferiority that underpinned slavery, disfranchisement, and segregation.⁵⁹ In the words of John Hope Franklin, “the new Negro history says to America that its rich heritage is the result of the struggles of all its peoples, playing the roles that conditions and circumstances permitted them to play. . . . In this context, the role of the Negro in America is not only significant in itself but central in the task of fulfilling the nation’s true destiny.”⁶⁰ In the case of Esteban, that destiny was conquest.

While Logan argued passionately that Esteban could only be Black, he also understood that American racism did not apply to African Americans alone, remarking that, “Even if the Cuarto Centennial had made [Esteban] a Moor rather than a Negro, he might have suffered in Texas in 1940 the same fate that he met in New Mexico in 1539.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁵⁹ John Hope Franklin, “The New Negro History,” *The Journal of Negro History* 42, no. 2 (April 1957): 94.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶¹ Logan, “Estevanico,” 306.

Between Arab and Black

While Logan was correct that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Arab immigrants faced discrimination, racialization, and even vigilante violence, they were also deemed White in the eyes of the law.⁶² Between 1909 and 1915, in a series of racial prerequisite cases, Syrians positioned themselves as White, successfully litigating a place in the dominant race and the national body politic by offering evidence of their economic success, acquisition of property, and Christian heritage.⁶³ These “common knowledge” arguments supporting Syrians’ claims to White racial identity operated alongside scientific rationales that Syrians were “Caucasian” according to the work of contemporary ethnologists.⁶⁴ In 1914, Kalil Bishara published the ethnological treatise *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, which traced Syrians to their biblical “aboriginal” progenitors, whom he described as “pure Caucasian.”⁶⁵ By claiming Whiteness, Syrians distanced themselves from the exclusion, disfranchisement, and “inferior” status of Black and Asian racial categories. Although Syrians became “White by law,” they existed on the racial margins. Sarah Gualtieri has argued that “even with their victories in the courts, Syrians continued to be perceived as not fully white but somewhere in between the poles of ‘Asian’ and ‘[B]lack’ in American racial schemes.”⁶⁶ Still, in the early twentieth century, for the most part, Syrians saw themselves as White Americans. Syrian claims to

⁶² See Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*; and Lopez, *White By Law*.

⁶³ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁶ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 4.

a White racial identity are evident in their earliest claims to Esteban's legacy. In 1965, Adele Younis wrote that "Esteban the Arab" penetrated the American Southwest, "which had not been seen before by a [W]hite man."⁶⁷

As Younis wrote these words, Arab American demographics and identity underwent significant changes. A new and more diverse wave of immigrants migrated from the Middle East—Iraqis, Palestinian refugees, Yemenis and Lebanese fleeing civil war, among others. These immigrants were more educated and politically minded than the Ottoman Syrians who preceded them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many of the new generation of Arabic-speaking immigrants were Muslim. Forged in the upheavals of decolonization, the "Arab" identities of recent arrivals were strongly anti-colonial and allied with the common struggles of the Third World. According to Pamela Pennock, "[d]ue to their social status and to the recent histories of the countries from which they came, Arab immigrants in this period tended to have an identity grounded in anticolonial movements of people of color."⁶⁸ Although a nascent Arab consciousness had existed among Syrians in the early twentieth century, the 1967 War in which Israel occupied the Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and Gaza galvanized and politicized many Arab Americans.⁶⁹ Catalyzed by the war, and racialized as terrorists, foreigners, and threats at home, Arab Americans experienced a "racial

⁶⁷ Adele Younis, "Arab Adventures in the New World," in *The Action Committee on American Arab Relations Yearbook: 1965-1966* (New York, New World Press, 1966), 3.

⁶⁸ Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab-American Left*, 111.

⁶⁹ See Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans*.

moment” in which Arabs were perceived and many perceived themselves as “people of color.”⁷⁰



Figure 5 Dr. Muhammad Taki Mehdi and Malcolm X in 1958, (Ferry Building, San Francisco, CA)

This was especially true for activists and scholars of the Arab American Left, who were inspired by the Black Power movement. Black Power activists understood African Americans as a colonized group within the nation’s borders fighting in a common struggle alongside Third World liberation groups.⁷¹ As much as colonialism made race,

⁷⁰ Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 19.

⁷¹ See Pennock, *Arab-American Left*, 110; and Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

attempts at their undoing were bound inextricably together in anti-racist and anti-colonial movements in the United States and beyond. Dr. Muhammad (M.T.) Mehdi pioneered a pro-Palestine Arab American activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Some have called Mehdi the father of Arab American activism, and he engaged in coalition building efforts across racial lines. Mehdi founded an Arab-Black solidarity organization, and arranged Malcolm X's transformative pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964.⁷² After the pilgrimage, Malcolm X, who had previously shed the surname he equated with slavery, changed his name to Al-Hajj Malik Al-Shabazz, an Arabic name that reflected his Muslim identity. On one occasion, Malcolm X remarked that "Arabs must...make an effort to reach the millions of people of colour in America who are related to Arabs by blood."⁷³

In this period of racialization and ethnicization, activist and educator Beverlee Turner Mehdi (whose husband was the aforementioned activist Muhammad Mehdi) defined Arab American identity broadly, writing:

When we speak of Arab-Americans, we are, in reality, speaking of a group of Americans who trace their heritage to some twenty different Arab countries, extending from Morocco in the West to the United Arab Emirates in the East. As would be expected, a geographical area this large has not produced a single homogenous culture, but rather has been a melting pot for cultures differing in race, religion, and political ideology. What

⁷² John Andrew Morrow, "Malcolm X and Mohammad Mehdi: The Shi'a Connection?" *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 5 (Winter 2012), 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

then is an Arab? An Arab is a person who comes from the part of the world described above, speaks the Arabic language, and considers himself or herself to be an Arab.⁷⁴

Turner-Mehdi defined Arabness by language and by the political coalition of the Arab League, an organization founded in Cairo in 1945 to protect the independence and sovereignty of its member states, which by 1978 numbered twenty-two Arabic-speaking countries. In 1914, Kalil Bishara had described Syrians by such pseudo-scientific racial categories as “Caucasian,” “White,” and “pure Semitic;” by the 1970s, Arab identity was imagined through politics, culture, and language—not “blood.” Turner Mehdi’s expansive definition of Arab American identity seemed to open the possibility of a Black Arab, raising the question: could Esteban be both Arab and Black?

The historians who constructed the Arab American National Museum’s (AANM) narrative confronted this question. Two prominent Arab American scholars, Alixa Naff and Michael Suleiman debated Esteban’s inclusion in the narrative.⁷⁵ While Naff and other historians of the early Arab experience typically began Arab American history with Ottoman Syrians, Suleiman wanted to begin with Esteban.⁷⁶ But Suleiman did have doubts about whether a Black man could also be an Arab.

Suleiman’s papers at the AANM archive reveal his own efforts to uncover Esteban’s true racial identity. Among more than a dozen articles on Esteban written in English, French, and Arabic, including Rayford Logan’s, is a letter from anthropologist Rosina

⁷⁴ Morrow, “Malcolm X and Mehdi,” 12.

⁷⁵ Sally Howell, email message to author, March 31, 2017.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Hassoun of the University of Florida, dated February 1, 1995. Hassoun scrawled a hasty post-script on the bottom right-hand corner of the page, “As a biological anthropologist, I see no contradiction between being Black (dark-skinned) and Arab. These are not mutually exclusive. Arab is...a cultural macro/ethnic designation. If linguistically he spoke Arabic he was Arab.”⁷⁷ It is unclear whether Hassoun’s post-script solved the mystery for Suleiman, but Esteban does appear in the AANM as the first Arab American.⁷⁸ Signaling his transformation, Esteban was renamed “Zammouri,” in Arabic, ““someone from Al-Zammour, Morocco.”” The AANM explained that “Zammouri was probably captured in 1511, by the Portuguese. He was then sold into slavery and his captors re-named him ‘Estebanico.’”⁷⁹ Re-naming Esteban not only claimed his origins in the Arab World, it restored to him a history obscured by his enslavement. Just as Malcolm Little had liberated himself from the legacy of slavery by becoming Malcolm X and Al-Hajj Malik Al-Shabazz, Esteban de Dorantes became Mustafa Zammouri. Still, Zammouri’s story—a story about a slave—does not fit neatly into the rest of the museum’s Arab American narrative.

More recently, anthropologist Hsain Ilahiane wrote “Estevan De Dorantes, the Moor or the Slave?,” a title which suggests that he could not have been both. In his interpretation, Esteban was most likely an Arab *Muslim*. Noting the conflicting accounts of Esteban’s phenotype, Ilahiane added, “whatever the pigmentation of his skin and his

⁷⁷ Letter, Rosina Hassoun to Michael Suleiman, February 1, 1995. AANM Archive Suleiman Collection.

⁷⁹ Hsain Ilahiane, “Estevan de Dorantes, The Moor or the Slave? The other Moroccan Explorer of New Spain,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 2007): 5.

phenotypical characteristics, [Esteban] was a native of Morocco and would also have been a Muslim when he left,” a detail never recorded in the Spanish accounts.⁸⁰

According to Ilahiane, Esteban’s actions on the road to Zuni—adorning himself with turquoise, bells, and feathers; having his food served to him; and “acquiring” Indian women—would all have been “normal or even laudatory in medieval Islamic society.”⁸¹

For Ilahiane, narrating Esteban’s story restored the voice and the agency of the colonized subject in the Spanish colonial project—“a project that involve[d] Christians, Indians, and Moors in between.”⁸²

Ilahiane’s account of an *Arab Muslim* Esteban appears in our current context of virulent Islamophobia, and his narrative makes a place for Arab Muslims as they face discrimination, racialization, and outsider status. Emplotting Arabs and Muslims at this critical moment of origin, at this moment of arrival and contact, makes claims to American identity. But it is a claim made with tensions—while Arab American identity is rooted in the anti-colonial struggles of the Arab world, American identity is a settler identity rooted in stories of arrival and contact, of conquest and colonialism. But being there at the moment of contact does not make a settler—staying does.⁸³ In Ilahiane’s narrative, Esteban lives; the Zunis held him in such high esteem that they refused to let him go. But if Esteban finally found a home, it is unlikely he will ever be laid to rest.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸³ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 95.

When I visited the Arab American National Museum to see the exhibit that inspired this chapter, I was surprised to see that the museum's representation of Zammouri was a shadow-like silhouette. Looking into the plexiglass, the only face I could see was my own reflection. It struck me that this was that this was perhaps a more accurate representation of the Moroccan slave as we know him. We will never know the precise shade Esteban's skin, how he worshipped, the texture of his hair, the name his parents gave to him, or even his fate upon arriving at Zuni Pueblo on that day in 1539. And it is precisely Esteban's indeterminacy and inbetweenness—colonizer and colonized, Christian and Muslim, Arab and Black, monster and man—that offers so much space for interpretation. For Americans, telling our origins and our original sins—slavery and colonialism—are seldom far behind. But telling how we got here is not simply a project of settlers and immigrants, of racialized groups determined to belong, but an essentially human endeavor. For Arab Americans, claiming Esteban as “Zammouri” says we're not strangers, we've been here, and we belong.

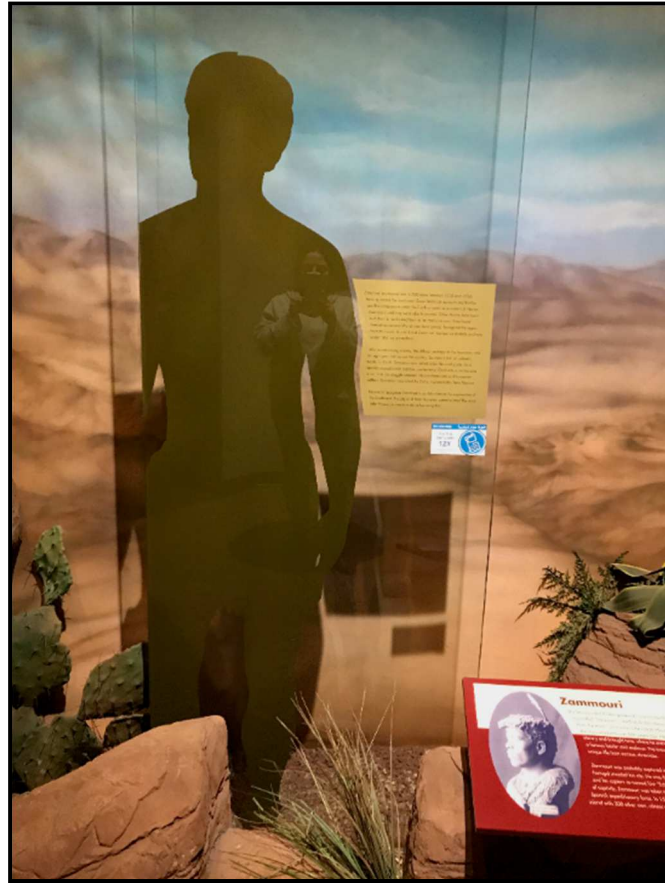


Figure 7 Zammouri Exhibit, photo by author, Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan

**CHAPTER TWO: BEASTS OF BURDEN: HI JOLLY, ARMY CAMELS, AND
ETHNIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN
SOUTHWEST**



Figure 8 Hi Jolly Monument, photo by author, Pioneer Cemetery, Quartzite, Arizona

“Was he a Greek, Arab, or Turk? Was his name Philip Tedro or Hadji Ali? Was he Mohammedan or Christian? Whatever the answers, he was a true son of the desert, his home the wide open spaces.¹”

Mulford Winsor, 1945

In 1935, in the midst of the Great Depression, Arizona Highway Department foreman James L. Edwards erected a stone pyramid over a decades-old grave. The

¹ “Hi-Jolly” Pioneer Biography by Mulford Winsor, 1945, Arizona Collection, Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, Phoenix.

forgotten gravesite had only recently been an unmarked plot overgrown with weeds and littered with debris accumulated over years of neglect. The abandoned cemetery was located just a stone's throw from what was then Highway 60, about 140 miles west of Phoenix, in La Paz County. Edwards constructed the pyramid-shaped structure on an eleven-foot square base from red, white, and blue stone, including bands of white quartz flecked with gold, petrified wood, and other native specimens.² Crowning the concrete peak of the structure, and secured with an iron rod penetrating the core of the monument, Edwards placed a two-foot-tall copper camel, which appears to perpetually survey the sparse desert landscape that surrounds it. Edwards' monument was dedicated to a somewhat peculiar figure of Arizona's history, a Muslim camel drover by the name of Hadji Ali—at least that was one of his identities. Hadji Ali was and is popularly known as “Hi Jolly,” a corruption of his Muslim name by the Texas soldiers he worked alongside after landing, camels in tow, on American soil. In 1856, the United States Army recruited Hi Jolly in Ottoman Smyrna to take part in an experimental Camel Corps to be employed in the newly conquered lands of the American Southwest; the project's promoters believed that camels could be used as transportation and as cavalry mounts in colonial wars against the region's Native peoples. Like the Narváez expedition and countless other colonial ventures—or misadventures—the Camel Corps was deemed a failure after less than a decade of government service. In some respects, the story of the camels can be seen as a metaphor for that of Hi Jolly, and perhaps for racialized workers writ large; like Hi Jolly, the camels were recruited to perform hard labor on the fringes of

² “Officials to Dedicate Hi Jolly ‘Camp’ Today,” *Arizona Republic*, January 4, 1936.

empire only to be abandoned by the government that they served. A copper plaque on the face of the imposing stone structure offers a brief commemoration of Hi Jolly:

THE LAST CAMP OF
HI JOLLY
BORN SOMEWHERE IN SYRIA ABOUT 1828
DIED AT QUARTZITE DECEMBER 16, 1902
CAME TO THIS COUNTRY FEBRUARY 10, 1856
CAMELDRIVER—PACKER—SCOUT
OVER THIRTY YEARS A FAITHFUL AID TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT
ARIZONA HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
1935

When Hi Jolly died on that December day, the town of Quartzite was a remote mining camp called Tyson’s Well in southwest Arizona Territory. Lore around the circumstances of his death has been told and retold over the years, and probably originated with a yarn spun by an old Texan by the name of Jimmy Walker. As the story goes, a party of cattle rustlers trekking down a valley in the area of Tyson’s Well spotted an old camel foraging not far from the camp. That evening at the local saloon (which was really just a tent), the men spoke of the sighting, when a “dark-skinned man there, listening rather quiet like...said: ‘Boys, where is that old camel?’” The men informed the swarthy old man of the animal’s whereabouts; and with that, Hi Jolly stood up, pulled his cowboy hat down, and marched off in the dromedary’s direction. That night a powerful sandstorm blew through the camp. The next day, according to Walker, while out hunting down cattle, the

men found the slumped bodies of the camel and the old man together half-buried in a drift of sand—Hi Jolly’s arms holding tightly to his old compatriot in a final embrace.³

In life, in death, and in memory, Hi Jolly and the camels have been inextricably linked. Whether or not Walker’s romanticized account is true, Hi Jolly *was* eventually buried with one of his camels; entombed in the pyramid grave are the ashes of the Arabian dromedary “Topsy,” which had served with Hi Jolly in the Camel Corps experiment so many years before. Both Hi Jolly and the camels have become part of the mythic West, particularly in Quartzite, Arizona, their final resting place. In part, this is because of their novelty, part of the local kitsch encountered by the Western road warriors and rock hounds who find their way to this remote corner of the American Southwest.

For nearly a century, academics and lay chroniclers have studied the Camel Corps experiment and its American leadership as part of U.S. military and transportation history, and as a curious and colorful chapter in the history of westward expansion. In his book *Mesa, Cañon, and Pueblo*, Southwest historian, archaeologist, and ethnographer Charles Fletcher Lummis described the Camel Corps as “[a]n important and romantic chapter in the story of the Great American Desert.”⁴ Lummis’ romanticized view

³ Gary Paul Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers: Desert Nomads Crossing Paths,” *Journal of Arizona History* 49:2 (Summer 2008): 115; Chris Emmett, *Texas Camel Tales: Incidents Growing Up Around an Attempt by the War Department of the United States to Foster an Uninterrupted Flow of Commerce Through Texas by the Use of Camels* (Austin: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1969).

⁴ Charles Fletcher Lummis, *Mesa, Cañon and Pueblo: Our Wonderland of the Southwest, Its Marvels of Nature, Its Pageant of the Earth Building, Its Strange Peoples, Its Centuried Romance* (New York: Century Company, 1925), 80.

obscures the fact that the Camel Corps was really about expanding Black enslavement into the Southwest and killing American Indians. The U.S. Army's importation of camels and of Middle Eastern and North African camel drivers was one of many efforts to secure the newly defined U.S.-Mexico border territory, a region ceded by Mexico in name, but not in fact, from Indigenous peoples. Thus, slavery, colonialism, and race are central to the Camel Corps' history. In this telling, I explore the origins of the Camel Corps in the antebellum period, which were deeply informed by both the orientalizing of the desert Southwest and by the colonial science of acclimatization. And while studies of the Camel Corps briefly mention the camel drivers, they offer little to no in-depth treatment of the immigrant contract laborers who were so essential to the project.

In recent years, Hi Jolly has been a subject of interest for ethnic historians. Like other aspects of Hi Jolly's life, his origins and ethnic identity are something of a mystery, dominated by conflicting accounts by Hi Jolly himself, and those who knew him best, but also by scholars and journalists. Recruited by the U.S. military in the polyglot city of Ottoman Smyrna, he was variously categorized as a Greek, Turk, Arab, and "Mohammedan." Likewise, in his lifetime, Hi Jolly claimed Greek, Arab, and Muslim identities, immigrating to the United States under a Muslim name, and later changing it to the Greek moniker, Philip Tedro. But he has also gone by the names Phillipou Teodora, Félipe Tidro, and on one occasion, he was reportedly known as "frijol," the Spanish word for "bean." Mostly, though, people seem to have called him by the Texan-English transliteration of Hadji Ali—Hi Jolly—and so will I.

The handful of studies that examine his life focus on his identities as almost singularly Greek, Arab, Turkish, or Muslim.⁵ They rightly emphasize his significance in terms of the contributions of each ethnic group to the making of America. But Hi Jolly was a multiethnic and multireligious individual who moved from one diverse empire to the frontier of another, a borderland that had been a part of the United States for less than a decade. The region was not just home to American Indians, Mexicans, and Black and Anglo Americans, but East Asians and European ethnics of all stripes. Like Esteban, Hi Jolly can be seen as what Paul Spickard and Rebecca King-O’Riain have termed “shape shifters.” In O’Riain’s words, “Shape shifting is a positive and dynamic view of social agency...to better understand the dialectical relationships between social structures and social actors.”⁶ Hi Jolly was a dark-complexioned ethnically and religiously complex individual, and this afforded him ethnic choices throughout the course of his life. As I will show, Hi Jolly made pragmatic choices about his racial, ethnic, and religious positioning that were rooted in the places he inhabited. Like other Arab and Middle

⁵ See Steve Frangos, “Philip Tedro: A Greek Legend of the American West,” *Greek-American Review* 56:692, December 2005; 25-32; Steve Frangos, “The Turkish Bushwhacking of Hi Jolly and Greek George,” *The National Herald*, August 23, 2008; Hsain Ilahiane, “Not Just ‘Immigrants’: 3 Arab-Americans Central to American History,” *Informed Comment*, January 26, 2016 [<https://www.juancole.com/2016/01/not-just-immigrants-3-arab-americans-central-to-american-history.html>]; Michael W. Suleiman, unpublished manuscript, Suleiman Collection, Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan; Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2006); Gary Paul Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers: Desert Nomads Crossing Paths,” *Journal of Arizona History* 49:2 (Summer 2008); Gary Paul Nabhan, *Arab/American: Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008).

⁶ See Lily Anne Y. Welty Tamai, Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly, and Paul Spickard, *Shape Shifters: Journeys across Terrains of Race and Identity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

Eastern peoples, Hi Jolly existed on the racial margins, a position fraught both with the dangers of exclusion and opportunities to transform.

While Hi Jolly's multiplicity makes him a curious figure, the less remarkable reality is that he was an immigrant who worked mostly for wages, carving out an oftentimes precarious existence on the frontier. As such, Hi Jolly was like scores of single men who lived, worked, and traveled to the American West to seek their fortunes, to escape other realities, or just to get by. As his epitaph suggests, Hi Jolly worked for the U.S. Army as a camel driver, guide, and scout, but at other times he delivered mail and freight and sold water to parched travelers along stagecoach routes; he also worked as a saddle maker, miner, and prospector at various times in his life. Patricia Nelson Limerick points out that mythic visions of the American West as a place where natural resources could be easily transformed into profit by enterprising individualists obscures an important reality of frontier labor, that "Western expansion was a lot of work," and that work was often paid in wages.⁷

In his on-again-off-again employment with the army, Hi Jolly was also an agent of American empire. Racialized immigrants often participated in advancing settler projects, including Indian dispossession and Black enslavement. Hi Jolly's story intersects both of these projects. Even after the Camel Corps' ostensible failure, Hi Jolly continued with the U.S. Army during the Civil War and through the brutal Apache Wars. Hi Jolly's apotheosis as a "pioneer" and a "frontier settler" have their origins in his active participation in American empire-building from the mid-1850s until at least the mid-

⁷ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 97.

1880s. As his epitaph clearly states, Hi Jolly was a “faithful aid” to the U.S. government, but the U.S. Government was not so faithful to him.

The pyramid tomb also contains a few of Hi Jolly’s belongings, his army contracts as camel driver and scout, and letters written by government officials verifying decades of loyal military service. These documents were no doubt part of Hi Jolly’s unsuccessful efforts to secure a military pension in the bitter winter of his life. For all his years and employments laboring in the West, and however and wherever Hi Jolly actually died, he died in abject poverty. At his death, Hi Jolly’s net worth was a mere sixty cents, a western fortune which Edwards interred with him. Adding insult to injury, neither the U.S. nor Arizona government⁸ actually paid for the renovation of Hi Jolly’s grave; foreman Edwards funded the project with his own money.⁹ If today we view Hi Jolly as a peculiar figure of western history and lore, in the depths of the Great Depression, with the violent attack on the Bonus Army only a few years past, Hi Jolly likely seemed a far more common, recognizable, and sympathetic representation of the down and out worker—the forgotten veteran—than one we can possibly know today.¹⁰

⁸ Arizona officials did, however, speak at the monument’s commemoration in January 1936.

⁹ J. Marvin Hunter, *Old Fort Verde, the Home of the Camels: A Romantic Story of Jefferson Davis’ Plan to Use Camels on the Texas Frontier* (Bandera, Texas: Frontier Times, 1948), Suleiman Collection, Arab American National Museum and Archives, Dearborn, Michigan.

¹⁰ During the Great Depression, tens of thousands of World War I veterans marched on Washington to demand their pensions early. The Hoover Administration infamously used the army, led by General Douglas MacArthur, to violently expel encampments of veterans in the capital after the march. World War I veterans finally received their pensions in 1936, the year Hi Jolly’s monument was dedicated.

The U.S. Army Camel Corps

The U.S. Army Camel Corps was established by U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, who would later become president of the Confederacy. The nexus of the Camel Corps and the Confederacy was slavery. Davis's expansionist interests in the Southwest, including the Gadsden Purchase, a southern railroad to the Pacific, and the Camel Corps were all part of his vision of a slaveholding southwest. Camels, Davis reasoned, would expedite travel for westbound White settlers and enslaved Black people. According to Kevin Waite, "An American Camel Corps—funded by Congress, outfitted in the Middle East, and transported to the desert Southwest—was Davis's grandest western initiative next to the Pacific Railroad."¹¹ Beginning in 1851, Davis tried to convince Congress of the utility of the camel in the territories conquered in the U.S.-Mexican War. In 1851 he asked for an appropriation for the camels, equipment, and ten "Arab" drivers. For years his idea failed to gain traction, let alone appropriations, but it did garner more than a few snickers.¹²

In the mid-nineteenth century, American colonial ambitions west of the Mississippi River intensified, driving the United States to invade Mexico. After a futile attempt to purchase California from the Mexican government, President James K. Polk ordered the U.S. Army under Zachary Taylor to occupy the disputed territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers. The provocation aimed to draw Mexico into a war cast as a battle for civilization in the region. The fighting that followed occurred primarily in central

¹¹ Kevin Waite, "Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire in the Far West," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (December 2016): 546.

¹² Harlan D. Fowler, *Camels to California: A Chapter in Western Transportation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 9.

Mexico, but also in California and New Mexico. When the Mexican government continued to refuse negotiations after critical losses, Polk ordered the U.S. Army under Winfield Scott to occupy Mexico City. The war ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, in May 1848. The treaty codified the annexation of Texas, and ceded California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah to the United States for a mere fifteen million dollars. By the terms of the treaty, the United States assumed responsibility for policing the border and crossings into Mexico, and also of protecting its own emigrant parties and wagon trains. With the exception of the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, this predatory inter-imperial war established the contiguous boundaries of the United States in North America. The war had far-reaching consequences for the United States, Mexico, and the region's Indigenous peoples. While Mexico lost more than half of its territory, the war helped to elevate the United States to world power status, made possible U.S. dominance over the Pacific basin, and contributed greatly to American economic might.¹³ In 1850, the United States boundary commission began surveying the U.S.-Mexico border.

Although the United States won the war with Mexico for *de jure* possession of the land, American Indian nations continued as the Southwest's *de facto* sovereigns. As Brian DeLay has pointed out, throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Mexico City did not control the northern reaches of its territory. The Native peoples who inhabited the region—the Apache, Ute, Navajo, Kiowa, Comanche, and others—dominated what became the U.S. Southwest.¹⁴ As DeLay described it, before the U.S.-Mexican War, a

¹³ Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), xx.

¹⁴ See DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, and Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

“war of a thousand deserts” raged across Northern Mexico. For the Mexican government, these wars rendered its northern territories into uninhabitable “deserts.”

Four years after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the war, the U.S. House of Representatives debated an appropriation for the use of camels in the Southwest to aid in the fight against the region’s Native peoples. Maryland Whig Alexander Evans argued for the appropriation, remarking
there are many broad arid plains in western Texas, New Mexico, and elsewhere, where, for want of water, it is impossible to pursue the Indians, and they easily escape. The introduction of camels...will afford greater facilities to overtake and conquer these Indians...¹⁵

He continued, “the Secretary of War [Jefferson Davis]...is satisfied that he can introduce and keep camels there, and can introduce persons to take care of them.”¹⁶ North Carolina Democrat Abraham Venable reminded his colleagues that the Spaniards had introduced both the horse and the cow to North America, and that importing the camel to the Southwest was tantamount to a “moral question of civilization upon our frontiers.”¹⁷ In fact, the Spanish had introduced a number of North African plants and animals to the desert Southwest.¹⁸ As Venable pointed out, colonial expansion did not simply entail the

¹⁵ Alexander Evans debates appropriation for camels, August 16, 1852, 32nd Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁸ Charles C. Colley, “The Desert Shall Blossom: North African Influences on the American Southwest.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (July 1983): 278.

migration of peoples, but the movement of all manner of biota from across the globe. Finally, in 1855, Davis's idea received congressional support on the order of \$30,000.

A Racialized Landscape: Deserts as “Other” in the American Imagination

In his book *Ecological Imperialism*, Alfred W. Crosby explained that the success of European settlers in temperate zones across the globe rested on ecological factors—namely the sometimes deliberate and sometimes unintentional importation of plants, animals, and diseases to the lands they colonized. Crosby argued that “the migrant Europeans could reach and even conquer, but not make colonies of settlement of these pieces of alien earth until they became a good deal more like Europe... The European advantage over the indigenes was not so much a matter of crop plants as of domesticated animals.”¹⁹ In his discussion of animals, Crosby examined the importation of pigs, cattle, horses, and other manner of beast large and small to settler colonies in North and South America, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Much like human settlers, these animals tended to become feral and multiply, oftentimes becoming a nuisance and a hazard, displacing indigenous flora and fauna. Davis's importation of camels to the Southwest is part of the ecological history of colonialism, one driven by science, ideology, and migration. Ideas of an “Other” landscape—one that seemed wildly different from that of Europe or of the eastern United States—inspired the importation camels, camel drivers, and other Mediterranean flora and fauna to the desert Southwest.²⁰

¹⁹ Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 172.

²⁰ See Gary Paul Nabhan, *Nabhan, Arab/American: Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008).

In the early nineteenth century, Americans understood foreign, newly conquered territories as figurative “deserts.” Much of the Louisiana Purchase, the expanse of territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, appeared to Americans as an uninhabitable “desert,” not a land of milk and honey ripe for agricultural settlement. In 1820, on an expedition across the Great Plains, Stephen Harriman Long famously called the territory the “Great American Desert.” The expedition’s zoologist, Thomas Say described the region a “trackless desert which...separated them from the utmost boundary of civilization.”²¹ During this period, the term “desert” carried specific connotations for geography, demography, and value. In 1828, Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* defined a “desert” as “forsaken...uninhabited...wild; untilled; waste; uncultivated; void; empty; unoccupied” or “as an uninhabitable tract of land...a vast sandy plain, as the deserts of Arabia and Africa.”²² Though the Great Plains west of the 100th meridian was certainly arid, the region was neither a geographic desert nor was it unproductive or uninhabited. Rather, Americans’ assertions that the land was an uninhabited, uncivilized, and desolate wasteland helped to justify its colonization.

The Southwest, on the other hand, encompasses vast tracts of land defined as geographic deserts—landscapes where water resources severely limit life. In 1953, geographer Peveril Meigs defined three types of deserts according to precipitation; in this schema, arid and extremely arid lands receiving less than 250 millimeters of annual rainfall are considered desert biomes. North America has four major deserts: Great Basin,

²¹ Kevin Z. Sweeney, “Whither the Fruited Plain: The Long Expedition and the Description of the ‘Great American Desert,’” *Great Plains Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 114.

Mojave (or Mohave in Arizona), Chihuahuan, and Sonoran. All four of these deserts lie in territories taken in the U.S.-Mexican War. The aridity of the American West, and particularly of the desert Southwest is one of the defining characteristics of the region. In 1853, Jefferson Davis attempted to remedy the water shortage for the army and emigrants by digging wells along southwestern routes where water resources were more than forty miles apart. The effort failed, however, as the water found was most often insufficient to meet the need.²³ In the mid-nineteenth century, Americans viewed the Southwest in both senses of the word, as Webster described it—forsaken, uninhabitable, and wild, but also as vast sandy plains like those in the Near East and North Africa.

Nineteenth century Americans often drew parallels between the deserts of the Near/Middle East (often referred to as the Holy Land) and North Africa and the newly conquered lands of the desert Southwest. This comparison was a common feature of literary discourse at a time when American travelers wrote extensively about their journeys to both regions.²⁴ In *Go East Young Man*, Richard V. Francaviglia shows the myriad ways Americans Orientalized the frontier West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Francaviglia, analogies drawn between the American West and the Orient were simply benign comparisons. But Orientalism, as described by Edward Said, was/is a way of seeing and describing the Orient as exotic, dangerous, and

²³ Frank Bishop Lammons, "Operation Camel: An Experiment in Animal Transportation in Texas, 1857-1860," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1957): 23.

²⁴ See for example, Richard V. Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011); Berman, *American Arabesque*; Lawrence R. Murphy, "The Great Arabian and American Deserts, Significant Parallels, and Notable Differences;" Gary Paul Nabhan, *Arab/American*; Charles C. Colley, "The Desert Shall Blossom."

backward, but also compelling. For Said, this mode of representation, codified as an academic discipline, fueled European colonial projects in the Middle East and North Africa during the nineteenth century. Orientalizing the American landscape and Native American peoples had the same effect. Landscape analogies between the United States and the “Orient” fueled American colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is apparent in one of Davis’s appeals to Congress: “On the older continents,” he continued, “in regions reaching from the torrid to the frozen zones, embracing arid plains and precipitous mountains covered with snow, camels are used with the best results... The example is cited of Napoleon, by the use of the dromedary in his Egyptian campaigns, subdued the Arabs, a race “whose habits and country were very similar to those of the mounted Indians of our Western plains.”²⁵

Americans also Orientalized the Southwest’s Indigenous peoples to both lament and justify land-taking, particularly in the popular genre of the travel narrative. American travelers projected the stereotype of the Bedouin they encountered in their travels—uncivilized and nomadic, yet picturesque—onto American Indians. Jacob Rama Berman writes, in these [Near Eastern travel] narratives, the American frontier is mirrored in the Arabian desert, and the politics of Indian removal are played out symbolically through travelers’ ruminations about disappearing Bedouins... The disappearance of primitive man in the

²⁵ United States Bureau of Animal Industry, *The Government’s Importation of Camels: A Historical Sketch*, Charles C. Carroll, *20th Annual Report*, Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904, 393.

face of civilized advance was a universal phenomenon, these travel narratives implied, visible in the Arabian desert as well as on the American frontier.²⁶

Parallel representations using the “Orient” as a mirror for the American Southwest and American Indians for Arab Bedouins and vice versa articulated ideologies and anxieties over continental expansion, but these analogies also helped Americans to envision how they might come to settle the desert landscape.

It is therefore unsurprising that prominent American politicians and military officials imagined the camel as the lynchpin of colonial success in the Southwest. Couched in terms of science and simile, American Army and Navy officials sailed for North Africa and Asia Minor on the hunt for Arabian dromedaries. The expedition mirrored closely the plotline of Joseph Warren Fabens popular 1851 novel, *The Camel Hunt: A Narrative of Personal Adventure*, in which an American traveled to Algeria to import camels for use in California.

To “Camel Land”

Americans familiar with the Middle East and North Africa—some of them Orientalists—introduced the idea of acclimatizing camels to the Southwest. Although Jefferson Davis founded the Camel Corps, the concept was the brainchild of George Robins Gliddon. English by birth, Gliddon was a leading Egyptologist and racial theorist who lived in the Middle East and North Africa for nearly thirty years, serving as U.S. consul at Cairo for eight years. He lectured on ancient Egypt throughout the United States, and was well-

²⁶ Berman, *American Arabesque*, 21.

regarded in the field by his contemporaries.²⁷ Gliddon is most well-known for his contribution to the development of the mid-nineteenth century racial theory of polygenesis, which helped to bolster both American colonialism and racial slavery.²⁸ Polygeny was a uniquely American scientific doctrine, and was one of the first scientific theories of U.S. origin that won the respect of the European scholarly community.²⁹ In the words of Stephen Jay Gould, “it is obviously not accidental that a nation still practicing slavery and expelling its aboriginal inhabitants from their homelands should have

²⁷ Alan Levine, “Chapter 4: Scientific Racism in Antebellum America,” in *The Political Thought of the Civil War*, Alan Levine, Thomas W. Merrill, and James R. Stoner, eds. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018).

²⁸ Gliddon is associated with the American School of ethnography, alongside such figures as Samuel George Morton, Josia Nott, and Jean Louis Agassiz. In his most notable works, *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844) and *Crania Americana* (1839), Morton used biased quantitative measures of cranial capacity to show the racial inferiority of both American Indians and Black people.²⁸ In *Crania Aegyptiaca*, Morton argued for the immutability of the human races, Caucasian superiority, and Black inferiority; he classified the Caucasians of ancient Egypt in three categories: Pelasgic (pre-Hellenic peoples), Semitic, and Egyptian, ranked in that order. He included tables illustrating contemporary racial ranking as well: Caucasians on top, American Indians in the middle, and Blacks at the bottom; among Caucasians, his rankings measured Teutons and Anglo-Saxons on top, Jews in the middle, and Asian Indians at the bottom.²⁸ As consul at Cairo, Gliddon used his position to provide Morton with hundreds of skulls and other materials which formed the evidence for *Crania Aegyptiaca*. The American School’s racial schema appealed to the scientific community, but also to the general public and politicians with their sights set on colonizing the Southwest. In 1844, John C. Calhoun sought a meeting with Gliddon for scientific information on racial classification and ranking to argue for the annexation of Texas as a slave state. Calhoun “was convinced that the true difficulties of the subject could not be fully comprehended without the first considering the radical differences of humanity’s races, which he intended to discuss should he be driven to necessity.”²⁸ Gliddon referred Calhoun to his friend Morton.²⁸ Gliddon popularized and amplified Morton’s arguments in his own works, the most important of which was the seven-hundred-page tome *Types of Mankind; or Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History* (1854), an anthology of the works of Morton, Nott, Agassiz, and himself. The work included now infamous illustrations comparing Black people to orangutans and chimpanzees..

²⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 23.

provided a base for theories that [Black people] and Indians are separate species, inferior to whites.³⁰

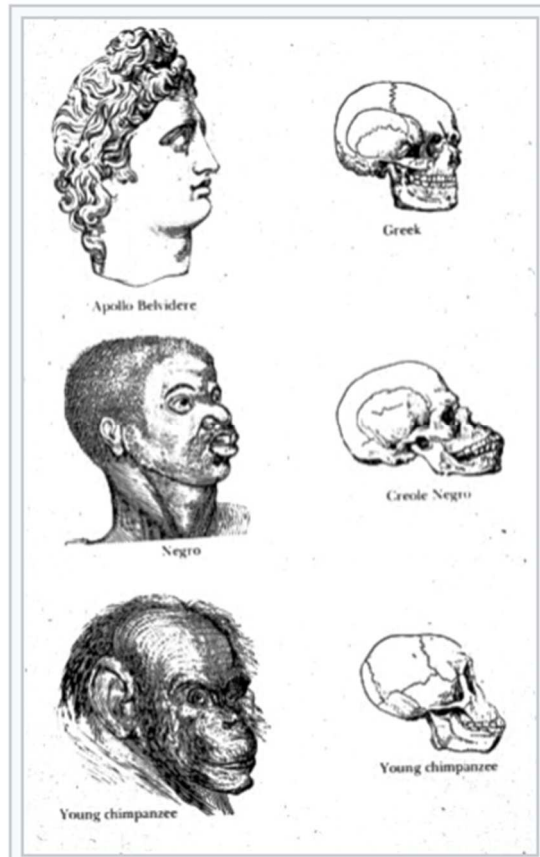


Figure 6 Illustration from George Gliddon and Josiah Nott's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857)

In 1852, he wrote a lengthy informational pamphlet on the acclimatization of the camel to the United States, which he presented to the Senate Committee on Military Affairs. The memorial bolstered Jefferson Davis's efforts to get the experiment funded. In his treatise, Gliddon argued for the superiority of camels to mules in the context of western expansion because the climate of the Levant, where camels served as the primary

³⁰ *Ibid.*

beasts of burden, was analogous to that of the American Southwest. It is perhaps unsurprising that a man of Gliddon's qualifications and interests led him to propose the importation of the camel to the United States. Like racial science, the colonial science of acclimatization was central to European settler colonial projects, and, like racial science, relied on systems of classification.³¹ According to Osborne, acclimatization "generally denoted an intended scientifically mediated transplantation of organisms."³² In 1860, Auguste Hardy, the father of the acclimatization movement, declared that "the whole of colonization is a vast deed of acclimatization."³³ One of the central questions of acclimatization was whether and how Europeans (and Americans) might adapt to life in colonies including Australia, Algeria, and the Southwest United States.

In 1855, American Army and Navy officials sailed for North Africa, Ottoman Syria, and Asia Minor on the hunt for camels and drivers. Davis selected four men to lead the expedition to the eastern Mediterranean. Navy Lieutenant David Dixon Porter, whose father served as consul at Constantinople, was placed in charge of the *Supply*. Second in command was Army Major Henry Constantine Wayne, who, like Gliddon, wrote a treatise on the camel and its value in the American context. Albert Ray also accompanied the expedition; he had served as army wagon master and mule master during the U.S.-Mexican War. He was a veterinarian by trade, and had translated several works on the

³¹ Harriet Ritvo, "President's Lecture: Going Forth and Multiplying: Animal Acclimatization and Invasion," *Environmental History* 17, no. 2 (2012), 405.

³² Michael A. Osborne, "Acclimatizing the World: A History of the Paradigmatic Colonial Science," *Osiris* 15, *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise* (2000): 135.

³³ *Ibid.*, 136.

camel before the expedition. Finally, Gwinn Harris Heap joined the ranks of the purchasing committee, Heap's father served as consul at Tunis for several years, and had some familiarity with the languages and customs of the region. Heap had also traveled from the Missouri River to the Pacific alongside Lieutenant Edward F. Beale in 1853; a year later he published an account of the expedition appended with a note on "Camels as a Substitute for Horses, Mules, etc."³⁴ All four men believed in the enterprise and were committed to making the mission a success.

The Americans on the purchasing expedition had very specific ideas about the breeds of camels that would best serve the region's military and commercial purposes. Major Wayne, a Georgia native who had attended West Point and served in the U.S.-Mexican War, classified the camels according to two types—dromedaries and camels, or Arabian and Bactrian varieties, the one-humped and two-humped groups, respectively. These were European, not native, classifications; "dromedary" or "Arabians" referred to camels devoted to riding, and "Bactrians" or "camels," referred to the pack animal. The army sought principally the Arabians for infantry and artillery purposes. In a letter to Davis, Lieutenant Porter wrote that "when landed in Texas... a corps of mounted dromedaries... would soon drive everything in the shape of a hostile Indian out of the country."³⁵ For Porter, the camel seemed to be the ideal worker (or, perhaps slave); even when subjected to the worst treatment, he "invariably found [camels] the same enduring,

³⁴ Fowler, *Camels to California*, 16.

³⁵ United States Senate, *Reports upon the Purchase, Importation, and Use of Camels and Dromedaries to be Employed for Military Purposes According to Act of Congress of March 3, 1855*, The Executive Documents, 1856-1857, Washington, D.C., A. O. P. Nicholson, Printer, 1857, 125.

obedient, and uncomplaining animals; they labor on from day to day, under the care of brutal drivers, and kneel down at night, after a hard days' work (the picture of meekness) to chew their small allowance of food; always ready to start again at a moment's notice, and scarcely ever exhibit anything like fatigue."³⁶

Under Davis' direction, the expedition made stops at London, Paris, and Spezzia en route to their destination. The men clearly viewed their mission as one of not just military but scientific import. Stopping at London to visit the Zoological Gardens, Wayne observed camels kept and bred in captivity. He questioned the zoologists and keepers about the care, breeding, and hardiness of the animal. Wayne left the gardens confident that Americans could care for the animals, writing Davis that, "[a]s to the difficulty of managing the camel, and the assertion that none but an Arab could do it, the attendants stated that they had never found any difficulty in doing so."³⁷ Both the secretary and professor at the gardens assured Wayne that the experiment was practicable. Both, Wayne noted, viewed the project as one of scientific and commercial importance.³⁸ Wayne departed London confident that his "researches...may be summed up in a few words, as follows: that the camel stands well the climate of London; that it breeds in it; and that a European can manage the animal as well as an Arab."³⁹ Still, they planned to hire native camel drivers to help train the soldiers in their care. Gliddon had also

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

recommended that ten Arabs be employed for a period of two years to train American soldiers in camel handling.⁴⁰

In the Mediterranean, Porter painted an unflattering portrait of the native camel drivers, which contrasted sharply with his view of the hardworking and docile camels. His views reflected both his own personal hubris and prevailing ideas of American and Western superiority and racial hierarchy. In Egypt, Porter hired three drivers, Mahomet Meriwan, Mahomet Jamen, and Alexander Aslanyan. They were referred to as two “Egyptians” who spoke a little English, and one “Arab Bedouin”; in another account, they are an “Arab Bedouin” an “Arab” and an “Armenian,” respectively.⁴¹ Porter was not impressed with the three, remarking that “a Bedouin or Egyptian cannot be taught much beyond what they already know, and I am of [the] opinion that an intelligent American will in a short time know more about the treatment of camels than they do.”⁴² Wayne also believed that American soldiers would make better handlers; he wrote that in time “Americans will be able to manage camels not only as well, but better than Arabs, as they will do it with more humanity and with far greater intelligence.”⁴³ Porter had better things to say about two Turkish saddle-makers he employed in Ottoman Smyrna (today Izmir, Turkey), one even “professed to be an M.D. of camels.”⁴⁴ These men were Mustafa

⁴⁰ Odie B. Faulk, *The United States Camel Corps: An Army Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 27.

⁴¹ Mike Moore to Ms. Hannigan, November 21, 2008, Quartzite Historical Society, Quartzite, Arizona.

⁴² *Reports upon the Purchase, Importation, and Use of Camels*, 115.

⁴³ Faulk, *Camel Corps*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Reports upon the Purchase, Importation, and Use of Camels*, 128

Hassam and Ali Saliman. The Turkish men, it seemed to Porter, were better workers than the Arabs, and while they were not particularly useful at sea, they accommodated well to the “Christian mode of life;” they were “good,” and “honest men...much preferable to the Egyptian and . . . of a higher order of intellect.”⁴⁵ Men of this caliber, Porter noted, could be procured at ten to fifteen dollars a month.⁴⁶ In addition to the Egyptians, Arab, and Turks, on February 15, 1856, the *Supply* departed Smyrna with a cargo of thirty-three animals: nine dromedaries, or “runners,” 23 camels of burden, and one calf. Among these were two Bactrian males (two-humped camels) for use in breeding with the Arabian females. The cross of the two animals produced what was called a “booghdee,” a hybrid considered a superior burden bearing animal.⁴⁷

The navy retrofitted the *Supply* with the shipment of camels in mind. Above the camel deck, a covered structure was built with hatches along the sides at intervals, to allow for fresh air to ventilate the stable which was located below deck. A camel car was constructed to load the animals onto the man-of-war; it was twenty feet long and seven feet wide, flat-bottomed, and fitted with an iron cage. If the camels resisted boarding the car, they were coaxed, and if they continued to resist caging, ten sailors forced them in with a block and tackle. The animals, weighing on average 1400-2000 pounds, were held on the lower deck on the ship, and tied down in a kneeling position. They would be kept in this position for days on end, unable to stand. One of the animals had been kept aboard the ship for eight months without leaving, and the most recent purchases forced to

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 128

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Carroll, “The Government’s Importation of Camels,” 397.

withstand confinement on the lower deck for three months.⁴⁸ Protection and care for their investment was the order of the day. Porter penned a set of rules and regulations for the care of the animals, which mandated that the animals be fed and brushed daily, and the quarters of the camel deck be kept clean and whitewashed. Further, the camels were not to be struck with anything “but the flat of the hand.”⁴⁹ According to Porter, the men hired to care for the camels were “useless” and the so-called camel M.D. an “Oriental Sangrado.”⁵⁰ In spite of his assessment, all camels survived the journey, except for one which died giving birth; two of the six camels born onboard also survived.⁵¹ Porter reported the relative ease of transporting camels, in comparison with horses and mules, even in the severe weather, which he described as “uncommonly rough” on the journey from Smyrna to Texas.⁵² Albert Ray of the Army Quartermasters Department named his charges “in the picturesque nomenclature of the Orient”: Gourmal, Adela, Mahomet, Massandra, Ibrim, and Ayesha, among others. When the cargo finally disembarked the *Supply* on May 14, 1856, the camels, feeling once again the ‘solid earth’ beneath them . . . became excited to an almost uncontrollable degree, rearing, kicking, crying out, breaking halters, tearing up pickets,

48 If the camel ship conjures images of slave ships, it is probably because camel ships were eventually used for smuggling slaves from North Africa to Texas. According to Michael E. Woods, British warships patrolling the African coast identified slave ships by tell-tale characteristics like large water tanks, overabundant food supplies, and the stench of excrement . . . Camels offered the perfect cover.” See Michael E. Woods, “The Dark Underbelly of Jefferson Davis’s Camels,” *Muster, Journal of Civil War Era*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/2017/11/dark-underbelly-jefferson-daviss-camels/>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁵² *Reports upon the Purchase, Importation, and Use of Camels*, 60 and 97.

and by other fantastic tricks demonstrating their enjoyment of ‘the liberty of the soil.’ Some of the males, becoming even pugnacious in their excitement, were with difficulty restrained from attacking each other.⁵³

Soon after landing, Wayne first demonstrated to the camels the hard-driving nature of their new employment with the U.S. Army. Upon their arrival, the local residents of Indianola, Texas, were not shy in expressing mocking skepticism of the proposed experiment. Exasperated by the jeers of naysayers, Wayne determined to teach the locals a lesson by demonstrating the camels’ sheer strength. Wayne brought one of his finest before a party of curious onlookers. He ordered the animal to kneel, and secured two bales of hay weighing 314 pounds apiece to the animal. The crowd continued to heckle the Major, convinced that the animal could not bear the burden; at this, Wayne order two more bales be loaded on, a cargo weighing more than 1250 pounds. As the story goes, to the amazement of all, and to the confusion and consternation of the cynics, the camel rose easily on command, and walked away. This episode was apparently commemorated in verse by a local poet who witnessed the scene.⁵⁴

Sure of the success of their enterprise, Porter and Heap immediately departed Indianola on a second voyage to secure another cargo of camels and camel drivers. In several interviews, in the 1880s, Hi Jolly claimed that he had accompanied both the 1856 and 1857 camel cargos from Smyrna to the gulf coast of Texas. In 1883, when interviewed by the *Arizona Epitaph*, Hi Jolly told the reporter that he had helped the U.S.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁴ Carroll, “The Government’s Importation of Camels,” 402.

government to secure 76 camels, a number which included shipments delivered in both 1856 and 1857. In 1885, a reporter for the *Arizona Gazette* interviewed Hi Jolly and wrote that he had “accompanied to this country both importations of camels...[he] took on board 36 camels at Smyrna, Asia Minor...Jolly recrossed the ocean and came back with another shipment.”⁵⁵ But military documents suggest otherwise. According to Heap, he met Hadji Ali (Hiogo Alli) and his cousin Mimico Teodora at the Old Caravan Bridge in Smyrna in 1856. Heap also hired several other men on this trip: Yiorgos Caralambo, Hadjiatis Yannaco, Anastasio Coralli, Michelo Georgios, Yanni Illato, and Giorgios Costi.⁵⁶ Major Wayne referred to Hadji Ali as a “Turk.”⁵⁷ In Smyrna, and through an interpreter, Hadji Ali ostensibly agreed to an employment contract with the U.S. Army as a camel herder earning \$15 per month, which was purportedly signed by Porter and witnessed by Heap.⁵⁸

Phillipou Teodora

Sources say that Hadji Ali was born Phillipou Teodora, sometime around 1828, which would have made him twenty-eight years old when he signed on to work for the U.S. Army. The details of Teodora’s early life are few. According to one story his mother was Greek and his father an Arab (sometimes they specify that he was a Syrian Christian.) Another story maintains that his Greek mother was taken captive by Arabs in her youth,

⁵⁵ “Government Camels: Imported to Explore the Great American Desert.” *Arizona Gazette*, October 8, 1885, University of Arizona Special Collections, Hayden Papers.

⁵⁶ Steve Frangos, “Philip Tedro,” np.

⁵⁷ Winsor, “Hi-Jolly,” 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

which led her to marry her Arab husband. They lived in Smyrna, where the name Teodora remains common.⁵⁹ Some say that Phillipou and Mico learned about camels in their youth by training wrestling camels (in Turkish, *deve güreçi*), a popular sport in the Aegean region of Anatolia. Their experience with camels may have also recommended the young men for service with the French in Algiers. It is also said that Phillipou Teodora converted to Islam during his service in Algiers, and shortly thereafter made the pilgrimage (*hajj* or *hadj*) to Mecca, upon which he earned the Muslim name “Hadji”—one who has performed the *hajj*. Thus, Phillipou Teodora became Hadji Ali. Like other rites of passage, this name change asserted not only a transformation in terms of self-identity, but also how Hadji Ali was perceived by others, and his social position within the religious hierarchy of the Ottoman Empire. So, Hadji Ali’s many transformations began long before he set sail for the United States aboard the *USS Suwanee* in 1856.

The Ottoman Empire and the port city of Smyrna were ethnically and religiously diverse, but unlike the United States the primary categories of identification were not based on race or ethnicity, but on religious difference. The Ottoman Empire, an Islamic empire, spanned three continents, incorporating vast populations where different languages, religions, and ethnic divides militated against assimilation. From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire developed the millet system to organize its religious communities into distinct groups which were indirectly ruled by their own religious leaders: Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian. The millet system spelled out

⁵⁹ Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers,” 99.

both the privileges and burdens of non-Muslim communities within the empire.⁶⁰ The basis for the millet system was the Islamic tenet of “faithful respect for People of the Book,” meaning Christians and Jews.⁶¹ Of course, this system did not confer equality to the empire’s non-Muslim subjects;⁶² they were recognized, protected, and tolerated, but they were not equal. Non-Muslim minorities were subject to the *jizya* (*cizye*) tax, they could not enter certain professions including the military, or wear certain clothes or colors, among other restrictions. And the millets do not truly convey the ethnoreligious complexity of the empire; for example, the Greek Orthodox Church had jurisdiction over many different ethnoreligious communities including ethnic Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Moldavians, Serbians, Ruthenians, Syrians, Arabs, and Melkites.⁶³ So the Greek Orthodox millet included within it religious and ethnic diversity.⁶⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century, the port city of Smyrna was equally diverse. Smyrna is located on the Aegean coast of western Anatolia and was an important commercial port in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was also the western terminus of the Silk Road. At the port, more than twenty caravanserai housed travelers from Greece, Africa,

⁶⁰ Karen Barkey and George Gavrillis, “The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and its Contemporary Legacy,” *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1, 25-26.

⁶¹ Tahir Abbas, “Historicising Pluralism and Monoculturalism,” in *Contemporary Turkey in Conflict: Ethnicity, Islam, and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 27.

⁶² Until the Tanzimat reforms (started 1839) and the Edict of 1856, conferred equality on all Ottoman subjects. Give some background here in the footnotes.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

and the Silk Road.⁶⁵ The city was conquered by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, but Greek influence remained strong. Smyrna's ethnoreligious groups included: Ottoman Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Levantines, and various European nationalities, each group inhabiting their own neighborhoods in the bustling city. Ethnic identities were strongly tied to religious affiliation; for example, in nineteenth century Smyrna the primary marker of Greek ethnic identity was Orthodox Christianity. Likewise, Sunni Islam was central to Ottoman Turkish identity.

For someone like Hadji Ali, therefore, religious conversion may have had consequences for claims to ethnic identity, and it certainly could have been a pragmatic move in a society where Muslims held more rights and opportunities than non-Muslims. While some non-Muslim Ottoman subjects converted to Islam for religious reasons, for many others, according to Selim Deringil, the gradations of conviction and motivation are almost infinite . . . [including] the small insults of everyday life: being referred to as *mürd* [term for dead animal] rather than *merhum* [having attained God's peace] when you die, not being allowed to wear certain colours or clothes, not being allowed to ride certain animals. These little barbs must have been a basic reason for many a conversion to Islam.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Gary Paul Nabhan, "The Further Adventures of Hadji Ali," *garynabhan.com* (blog), January 14, 2010, <https://www.garynabhan.com/news/2010/01/the-further-adventures-of-hadji-ali/>.

⁶⁶ Selim Deringil, "There is No Compulsion in Religion: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (July 2000): 547.

To join the ranks of Sunni Muslims in the Ottoman empire, one could receive amnesty for previous crimes, avoid taxation, join the military, and even receive gifts of money and clothing. In one case, a man even converted to escape his gambling debts. Richard Bulliet refers to these opportunistic conversions as “social conversion,” writing, “leaving aside ecstatic converts, no one willingly converts from one religion to another if by virtue of conversion he markedly lowers his social status.”⁶⁷ Perhaps important to Hadji Ali’s conversion, only Muslims were sanctioned to ride horses and *camels*.⁶⁸ But the fact that Hadji Ali performed the *hajj* might also indicate that his conversion was spiritual. Alternately, a combination of social and religious factors may have prompted his conversion to Islam. Thus, Hadji Ali understood life in an ethnically and religiously diverse place where boundaries were defined but permeable.

Upon landing in Texas, on February 10, 1857, Hadji Ali transformed once again. This time, his metamorphosis was imposed. As many have recounted, the soldiers at Camp Verde could not, or would not, correctly pronounce his name, bestowing upon him the Americanized sobriquet “Hi Jolly.” Much like his conversion from Christianity to Islam—from Phillipou Teodora to Hadji Ali—the change was a product of his surroundings and of the power dynamics of that specific context; in the Ottoman Empire, between Christians and Muslims; in Texas, between American soldiers and foreign workers. Michael Adams has pointed out that “the power to name is a politically charged

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

power. The right to bestow names is a right which signifies that the namer has power.”⁶⁹ Hadji Ali’s christening as “Hi Jolly” was perhaps the first step in his “acclimatization” to life in the frontier Southwest. The name itself, two commonplace words combined into a rather odd appellation that is simultaneously ordinary and anomalous seems, in retrospect, to suit him. Other drivers also adopted American nicknames: Yiorgos Caralambo became “Greek George,” promising that he would never shed his ethnic difference even though he later naturalized under the Anglicized name “George Allen.” Hadjiatis Yannaco took the nickname “Long Tom,” and Anastasio Coralli became “Short Tom.” In the context of the antebellum Southwest, “Tom” may have been a reference to the character in Harriett Beecher Stowe’s 1851 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; a “Tom” was a derogatory term for a house slave or an overly subservient or obsequious person who perceived their own racially inferior status. Likewise, the name “Topsy,” bestowed on the camel later interred in Hi Jolly’s monument, is the character of a young abused slave girl who also appears in Stowe’s novel.

Beale’s Wagon Road Expedition

On June 25, 1857, the War Department, now headed by John B. Floyd, sent Hi Jolly and several other drivers with forty-four soldiers, a team of topographical engineers, twenty-five camels, and numerous horses and mules, to chart the shortest distance between Fort Defiance, Texas and the Colorado River along the 35th parallel. Edward Fitzgerald Beale led the expedition. Beale gained notoriety as a naval officer in the U.S.-Mexican War in California, served as Superintendent of Indian Affairs (1852-1857), and

⁶⁹ Michael Adams, “Power, Politeness, and the Pragmatics of Nicknames,” *Names* 57, no. 2 (2009): 82.

had recently explored the region. While traveling through Death Valley with Kit Carson, Beale read Abbe Huc's *Travels in China and Tartary*, which inspired his interest in the Camel Corps.⁷⁰ It has been said that Beale was so taken with the concept of the Camel Corps that he learned to speak the "Syrian tongue" in order to communicate with the animals. In addition to the survey of more than two thousand miles of territory, the mission served as a testing ground for the camels' performance as beasts of burden in the Southwest.

Hi Jolly and the other drivers experienced problems from the outset of the expedition. While loading the wagons, the drivers refused to make the journey because they had not been paid according to their contract, although as Beale noted, the men had "performed their duties very faithfully."⁷¹ It was late June, and the men had not been paid since January. Their absence was a significant setback for Beale because the soldiers did not really know how to pack the camels. By the time they reached San Antonio, however, the camel drivers had rejoined the sortie. Nineteen-year-old May Humphries Stacy penned a picturesque description of the caravan's entrance into San Antonio on that hot summer day:

The first intimation we had of [the camels'] approach was the jingling of the large bells suspended from their necks. Presently, one, then two, three, four, until the whole twenty-five had come within range in the dim twilight. And thus they came, these huge ungainly beasts of the desert, accompanied by their attendants, Turks, Greeks, and Armenians...It

⁷⁰ Lewis Burt Lesley, ed., *Uncle Sam's Camels: The Journal of May Humphreys Stacey Supplemented by the Report of Edward Fitzgerald Beale* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library Press, 2006), 6-7.

⁷¹ Faulk, *The U.S. Camel Corps*, 106.

was a fine scene, and one calculated to awaken curious sensations in the breast of the observer.⁷²

The reality was not quite so romantic upon their arrival, but the drivers did create a scene. In his journal, Beale reported difficulties in keeping the drivers sober. Clearly, he expected the camel drivers—especially the Muslims—to abstain from alcohol and other pleasures of the flesh to be found in San Antonio. He noted that he “was anxious . . . to get the men out of town as soon as possible, as the fandangos and other pleasures had rendered [the camel drivers] rather troublesome.” Beale remarked that the “Turks . . . had not found, even in the positive prohibitions of the prophet, a sufficient reason for temperance, but drunk as any Christian in the train.” Billy Considine, one of the Americans, recommended to Beale a “cut glass decanter . . . aimed low,” but the Lieutenant countered that “to move a half-drunken Turk give me a good tough piece of wagon spoke, aimed tolerably high.”⁷³ That drunken Turk was Hi Jolly.⁷⁴

The camels were driven hard as well. The men loaded each camel with 700 to 1,000 pounds of cargo, which they carried over distances of 25-30 miles per day through rough terrain with little water.⁷⁵ On the leg of the journey between San Antonio and Albuquerque, Stacy wrote that “the animals having been driven very hard . . . now begin to exhibit signs of fatigue, and they are getting poor, notwithstanding they get corn at

⁷² Lesley, ed., *Uncle Sam's Camels*, 43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷⁴ Faulk, *The U.S. Camel Corps*, 107.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

night and grass whenever it is possible to graze them with safety.”⁷⁶ In spite of the difficult conditions, both the camels and drivers performed their duties, passing through Zuni (where Esteban was killed three centuries earlier), the Painted Desert, Peach Springs around the southern rim of the Grand Canyon, and finally, to the banks of the Colorado River near Needles, where Mojave Indians marveled at the sight of the alien creatures.⁷⁷ On October 17, 1857, when the detachment finally reached the Rio Colorado, Beale was concerned about the camels’ ability to cross, but Hi Jolly skillfully forded them. He tied five of the calmer animals together, with one of his favorites, Sa’id, in the lead; another group followed, and then another, until they made the crossing safely. Hi Jolly is said to have whispered or sang to soothe the camels as they made their safe crossing. The equines did not fare as well; two horses and ten mules drowned crossing the river. Some Mojave Indian bystanders offered the soldiers watermelons and cantaloupes to console them for their losses.

The Colorado crossing brought Beale’s historic mission to an end, and the Lieutenant considered the expedition and the camels an unqualified success. In his journal, Beale lavished praise on the camels writing, “there never was anything so patient and enduring and so little troublesome as this noble animal.” He continued, “[t]hey pack their heavy load of corn, of which they never taste a grain; put up with any food offered them without complaint, and are always up with the wagons, and withal, so perfectly docile and quiet that they are the admiration of the whole camp.”⁷⁸ On December 6, 1858, Secretary of

⁷⁶ Lesley, ed., *Uncle Sam’s Camels*, 73.

⁷⁷ Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers,” 108.

⁷⁸ Lesley, *Uncle Sam’s Camels*, 126.

War Floyd penned a missive to Congress stating unequivocally that the “adaptation of camels to military operations upon the plains may be taken as demonstrated.”⁷⁹ He recommended another appropriation be made to bring one thousand more camels to the Southwest. Wayne, who had been transferred to the office of the Quartermaster General in Washington, was honored with a first class medal from the Société Impériale Zoologique d'Acclimatation in Paris, for his successful introduction and acclimatization of camels in the United States.⁸⁰ News of the camels’ success was extolled in the press as well; the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that “[t]he camel is the last institution necessary—before the advent of the Pacific Railroad—to bend the uninhabitable frontiers of the continent into contact and annihilate the wilderness that separates the new from the old West.”⁸¹

Yet Beale was grossly misinformed in his assessment of the soldiers’ attitudes toward the camels; they were *not* delighted with their new mounts. While officers and the press praised their utility, the soldiers generally hated the camels. The men complained about the animals’ foul odor, the way they spat when angered, and the loud groaning and bleating sounds they uttered incessantly. A soldier kicked one of the camels in frustration, only to have the flesh stripped from his arm with one violent bite. Another camel was found beaten to death, which was blamed on the foreign drivers. The soldiers were “horse-and-mule men,” who preferred to work with animals they knew and understood. Odie Faulk wrote that to the soldiers, “the camel seemed a beast straight

⁷⁹ Lammons, “Operation Camel,” 40.

⁸⁰ Carroll, “The Government’s Importation of Camels,” 404.

⁸¹ Lesley, *Uncle Sam’s Camels*, 126.

from Satan's herd."⁸² Noted Southwest historian and archaeologist Charles Lummis wrote that even the horses and mules hated the camels, remarking that "the camels were unpopular with man and beast . . . [the] horse and mule and burro stampeded at the smell of them . . . They could not be handled at all, except by their native drivers, and they were anathema to the whole army of the Southwest."⁸³ The camels also reportedly struggled on the gravelly terrain, which injured their tender hooves. It is not clear whether this was a result of the hard manner in which they were driven after their long and sedentary journey from Smyrna to Texas.

The camels served in various capacities for a few years after Beale's expedition, in spite of the soldiers' complaints, but the experiment ultimately ended in failure. For a time, before the outbreak of the Civil War, Hi Jolly and Greek George used the camels to deliver supplies between Fort Tejon and Los Angeles. Another detachment of dromedaries was sent on William E. Echols' topographical expedition to the Val Verde area to explore the Big Bend and the "Great Comanche War Trail," and to locate sites for additional army posts. During the war, Secretary Floyd appointed General David E. Twiggs to command the Southwest, and the man absolutely hated camels. By 1864, the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department ordered the remaining camels to be sold to mining companies, cotton plantations, and circuses; some were even sent to Australia, where acclimatization efforts were also underway. On February 26, 1864, thirty-four of the camels were auctioned off at Benicia, California and the remaining animals were auctioned off on March 18, 1866. Many of the camels escaped into the desert, or were

⁸² Faulk, *The U.S. Camel Corps*, 87.

⁸³ Lummis, *Mesa, Cañon and Pueblo*, 86.

eventually released. It seems that the failure of the camel experiment rested on cultural factors, not the biological or ecological ones that interested acclimatization scientists. In the words of historian Frank Lammons, ““Operation camel passed into history because the camel was a foreigner. He did not ‘belong.’”⁸⁴

In spite of the Camel Corps’ failure, the spurned camels did, in fact, acclimate or “assimilate” to life in the desert Southwest. Those that escaped into the desert “went native” so to speak. Gary Paul Nabhan has written that camels from the army experiment and three other acclimatization attempts formed “a wild breeding population of at least one hundred sexually mature animals in the Gila River Valley. They adapted to a diet of Sonoran desert cacti and mesquite, so much so that they exhibited high reproductive rates and considerable vigor.”⁸⁵ In 1892, Hi Jolly reported that a herd of several hundred roamed wild over the desert plains.⁸⁶ In 1901, prospectors still spotted stray camels among the cacti and sagebrush that “had become as wild as deer.” Apparently, freedom had transformed their appearance, “the hides losing their hair and their hoofs losing their cushions.”⁸⁷ Tom Childs, who married into the Hia c-ed O’odham (Sand Papago) tribe once said that the Indians captured some of the runaway camels and made jerky out of them, and other stories of camels have become part of the tribe’s oral traditions.⁸⁸ From

⁸⁴ Lammons, *Operation Camel*, 50.

⁸⁵ Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers,” 113.

⁸⁶ “Hi Jolly’s Camels,” *Los Angeles Herald*, June 10, 1897.

⁸⁷ “Wild Camels of America,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 20, 1901.

⁸⁸ Nabhan, “Camel Whisperers,” 113.

time to time throughout the remainder of his life, Hi Jolly recaptured a few from these feral herds to assist with his labors.

Of Mules & Men

After the Beale expedition, as Jefferson Davis's dreams of a Camel Corps began to fade and the nation teetered on the precipice of war, Hi Jolly continued his peripatetic existence, traveling for a time on the backs of army camels but mostly army mules along Arizona-California-Mexico border. The camels remained briefly at Fort Tejon, near present day Bakersfield, at the southwestern corner of the San Joaquin Valley, and subsequently moved to Camp Drum, near Los Angeles. Beale established Fort Tejon in 1854 to suppress stock rustlers and to protect emigrant settlers from both discontented *Californios* and the Paiute, Mojave, and Chemeheui Indians who had been forced onto the Sebastian Indian Reservation. Immediately after the expedition, Beale used Hi Jolly and Greek George to run camel caravans between the Port of Los Angeles and Fort Tejon, where Beale owned extensive property. As a waypoint along the Stockton-Los Angeles Road in the late 1850s and early 1860s, Fort Tejon also served as a stagecoach station and checkpoint for the Butterfield Overland mail. There, Hi Jolly worked as a mule-back mail carrier for what was then called the "jackass mail," running the route from southern California to the Arizona-Mexico border. By 1860, Hi Jolly's wages had doubled from his original salary of \$15.00 per month to \$30.00 per month; in 1861, while stationed in Los Angeles, Hi Jolly was earning \$50.00 per month.⁸⁹ Calculated for

⁸⁹ "Hadji Ali (Hi Jolly) (Philip Tedro)," Biography Files, Arizona State Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

inflation, today, Hi Jolly's pay raises amounted to an increase from approximately \$475.00 to nearly \$1600.00 per month in the period of four years.

Hi Jolly's rising wages were likely a product of his thoroughgoing knowledge of the region, as he had traveled extensively throughout southern California and Arizona by the time the war broke out. A memo sent by Major Fergusson, headquartered at Camp Wright (near San Diego), gives us some insight into Hi Jolly's life and labors just before and during the Civil War. On December 13, 1861, Fergusson dispatched Hi Jolly back to Fort Yuma with a load of mail, a roundtrip journey of about 340 miles.⁹⁰ At a mule's pace of about fifteen miles per hour, it was a journey of nearly 24 straight hours. The day after he returned to camp, he was ordered to Vallecito, California, over 400 miles from Camp Wright, a journey which Hi Jolly was unable to complete due to illness (perhaps it was exhaustion). The next day, December 20, 1861, Fergusson sent Hi Jolly with a letter to Wagon Master Peel, to turn over three wagons of barley and make their way back to Fort Yuma. Hi Jolly returned to Camp Wright on December 21, and on December 22 delivered dispatches to district headquarters in Los Angeles, approximately 120 miles away. Before and during the war, Hi Jolly spent a lot of time on the back of a mule.

Army officers also entrusted Hi Jolly with highly sensitive military communications essential to protecting California from the machinations of Confederate sympathizers. Although the Civil War is typically cast as a struggle between North and South, the question of slavery in the West was the ultimate catalyst for war. As for Northerners and Southerners, for Western Americans, the stakes of the conflict ran high. According to

⁹⁰ Union Provost Marshals' File of Papers Relating to Individual Civilians, 1861-1867, Union Citizens File, Record Group 109, National Archives, Washington, D.C., <https://www.fold3.com/image/280174467>.

William Deverell and Anne Hyde, for Whites in the region, the war constituted a battle “to protect their own vision of a West full of opportunity and empty of Indians”; for Western American Indians, on the other hand, it was a battle to protect their homelands.⁹¹ The West also played an important role in the military and political strategies of both sides. In 1860, the Union was deeply concerned with the sectional loyalties of the border states, but also the West, where strong secessionist sympathies existed in California, New Mexico, Utah, Kansas, and Indian Territory. While the Confederacy, under Jefferson Davis, promoted a grand slaveholding empire in the Southwest to draw support for secession in the West, Abraham Lincoln ultimately consolidated regional support by creating new territories in the Dakotas, Colorado, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, and Arizona. Concerned with the rich mining region of the Southwest, Lincoln subsidized mail service, a transcontinental telegraph service, and later, railroads.

But in 1861, protecting California from secessionist threats was critical to the Union cause. Fort Yuma, Arizona, a frequent terminus for Hi Jolly’s missions, was a strategic location. Colonel James Henry Carleton, who had earned his stripes killing Indians in the Southwest, served as Commander of the of the District of Southern California during the war. In 1861, Hi Jolly worked as an express messenger for Carleton. A missive from Carleton to Colonel Joseph R. West reveals Hi Jolly’s role in the Union War effort, and also, his ethnic identity during this period—at least from the perspective of his army superiors. In the letter, Carleton wrote to West, “I desire you will report to me . . . as to the best methods for troops to cross the Yuma desert. Hadji Ali, the Turk who takes this

⁹¹ Deverell and Hyde, “Civil Wars Spread Over the West,” in *Shaped by the West: A History of North America*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 285.

letter to you, can give you much information . . . So let Hadji Ali, the expressman, go on without delay.”⁹²

An 1860 court case indicates that Hi Jolly’s religious identity as a Muslim was also well known. On July 12, 1860, Los Angeles Sheriff J. A. Sanchez served Hi Jolly a subpoena to appear as a witness on behalf of the people of the state of California at the L.A. Court of Sessions. In the *People v. George Henry Watson*, the defendant was charged with grand larceny for the theft of a government mule, bridle, and saddle, which he had apparently “borrowed . . . from Sargent Hadji Alli” and never returned.⁹³ After *voire dire*, which not only entails the interrogation of potential jurors but also the preliminary questioning of witnesses to determine their competence to testify, the District Attorney moved “to have one Hadji Alli a witness sworn.” Watson quickly objected “to said witness sworn according to statute for the reason that he is a Mohammedan.”⁹⁴ In short, Watson challenged Hi Jolly’s testimony on the grounds that he was a Muslim, and therefore not White, making him ineligible to testify against a White man. Watson pled not guilty to the charges, waived his right to an attorney, and declined to testify on his own behalf, so it seems he felt confident that Hadji Ali’s critical testimony would be silenced by the state’s testimony exclusion laws.

In 1850, just ten years before Watson’s trial, the first California Legislature, which was dominated by pro-slavery Democrats or “Chivs,” established racially exclusionary

⁹² William A. Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico, 1846-1848*, Facsimile of 1952 Edition (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2008), 224.

⁹³ *The People v. George Henry Watson*, Records of the Los Angeles Court of Sessions, July 16, 1860, Seaver Center for Western History Archives, Los Angeles, California.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

testimony laws that advanced the consolidation of white supremacy in the newly admitted state. The conquest of the American Southwest in the U.S.-Mexican War created new and complex racial dynamics and hierarchies among European Americans and immigrants, Mexicans, Asians, and Indigenous peoples in the region. This racial and ethnic landscape was far more complex than much of the nation, where racial divisions were primarily understood as Black and White. Diversity, against the backdrop of capitalist expansion into the state, created intense racial and ethnic struggles for position and resources.⁹⁵ The law and the courts were important arbiters in that struggle. J. A. C. Grant wrote that “the 1850-1872 legal climate of California was quite receptive to rules barring from the witness stand those whose veracity was suspect,” thus legislators expanded the scope of exclusionary testimony laws far beyond that of neighboring states and territories.⁹⁶ The first session of the California Legislature passed “an act concerning Crimes and Punishments” on April 16, 1850; section 14 of the law stated that “no black or mulatto person, or [American] Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person.”⁹⁷ The statute carefully delineated the meaning of these categories: “[e]very person who shall have one eighth part or more of Negro blood shall be deemed

⁹⁵ See Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*.

⁹⁶ J. A. C. Grant, “Testimonial Exclusion Because of Race: A Chapter in the History of Intolerance in California,” *UCLA Law Review* 17, no. 1 (November 1969): 193.

⁹⁷ “George Gordon - Gold Chains: The Hidden History of Slavery in California,” ACLU of Northern California, June 28, 2018, <https://www.aclunc.org/sites/goldchains/explore/george-gordon.html>.

mulatto, and every person who shall have one half of Indian blood shall be deemed an Indian.”⁹⁸

In 1854, the California Supreme Court extended the racial exclusion to testify to Chinese immigrants in *People v. Hall*. In this case, the court overturned defendant George W. Hall’s murder conviction because it relied on the testimony of Chinese witnesses. Chief Justice Murray’s opinion excluded these witness testimonies on the grounds that “Chinese are Indians within the meaning of the statute.”⁹⁹ This logic rested on prevailing ideas of racial science (then being developed by Camel Corps promoter George Gliddon, among others). Murray wrote in his decision that “[t]he similarity of the skull and pelvis, and the general configuration of the two races . . . together with the contiguity of the two continents. . . might well have led to the belief that this country was first peopled by Asiatics.” Racial stereotypes of Asians as “untrustworthy” also gave credence to arguments about whether Chinese witnesses could be bound by an oath — Justice Murray remarked that Chinese “mendacity is proverbial.”¹⁰⁰ Faith was implicated, but never expressly stated in California’s testimony exclusion laws. John R. Wunder has pointed out that religion and faith were linked to oath-taking, the foundation of witness testimony; he wrote, “The oath—a promise to tell the truth or face God’s wrath—was dependent upon the witnesses’ religious beliefs . . . [and] non-Christian adherents and

⁹⁸ Laws of the State of California, “An Act Concerning Crime and Punishments,” April 16, 1850, 230, http://www.aclunc.org/docs/FINAL_California_Testimony_Exclusion_Laws.pdf.

⁹⁹ Grant, “Testimonial Exclusion,” 194.

¹⁰⁰ John R. Wunder, “Chinese in Trouble: Criminal Law and Race on the Trans-Mississippi West Frontier” *Western Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (January 1986), 27.

nonwhite litigants were especially susceptible to the challenge.”¹⁰¹ After laying out his rationale, Murray interpreted what he viewed as the intent of California lawmakers in establishing exclusionary testimony laws: “the Legislature. . . adopted the most comprehensive terms to embrace every known class or shade of color, as the apparent design was to protect the White person from the influence of all testimony other than that of persons of the same caste.”¹⁰² This logic did not, however, protect Black, Indian, Chinese, or mixed-race people from the testimonies of Whites.

The exclusion of Chinese witnesses called into question the right of other Asian groups to testify against Whites. In 1857, in *Sanchez v. Stout*, the counsel for the plaintiff challenged Filipino witness Gregario Escalante’s competence to testify. Escalante reported that his father was Spanish and he was not certain about his mother’s racial identity. Another Filipino witness who also hailed from Manila judged Escalante to be a “Chinese Mestizo,” based on his appearance. The court, therefore, excluded Escalante under the rule of *People v. Hall*. While the judge decided Escalante’s right to testify based on phenotype, this reasoning did not extend to Turks. According to Grant, *People v. Elyea* marked the first break with strict categorization based on skin color in the California courts.¹⁰³ In *Elyea*, the California Supreme Court sustained the murder conviction of a White man based on the evidence of a Turkish immigrant by the name of Martin. While a lower court deemed him ineligible to testify, and although he had dark skin, Justice Cope sustained the conviction and the Turk’s right to testify, writing, “The

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Grant, 195.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 196.

indicium of color cannot be relied upon as an infallible test . . . It may be a sufficient test in many cases, but only when it is so decided as to leave no doubt of the particular race to which the witness belongs.” He continued, ““although the population of Turkey is made up, in some degree, of several distinct types of the human race, the Caucasian largely predominates,” and hence even a rather dark Turk may testify.”¹⁰⁴ While *People v. Elyea* is not cited in the incomplete court records available for Watson’s case, Judge William G. Dryden¹⁰⁵ overruled the defendant’s objection to Hi Jolly’s testimony. Hi Jolly was sworn in and examined by the District Attorney; Watson offered no rebuttal, and was summarily convicted by a jury of his peers. George Henry Watson was sentenced to four years in San Quentin Penitentiary for the theft of a government mule.

Although American courts did not explicitly bar religious groups as they did racial groups, Watson’s objection points to the popular racialization of Islam and Muslims in the United States. American Islamophobia hearkens back to early English settlers in New England, who conflated Turkish and Muslim identity, and depicted Muslims as “brutish, uncivilized, and tyrannical,” and as symbols of the anti-Christ.¹⁰⁶ Puritan leader Cotton Mather responded to the depredations of North African or “Barbary” pirates on British ships, calling Muslims ““Mahometan [Muhammadan] Turks, Moors, and Devils.””¹⁰⁷ These stereotypes continued into the Early Republic, when American politicians used

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Paul R. Spitzzeri, “Case by Case Basis: Ethnicity and Los Angeles Courts, 1850-1875,” *California History* 83, no. 2 (2005), 34.

¹⁰⁶ Edward E. Curtis IV, “The Islamophobic History of the United States,” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (2011): n.p.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

“Muslim” as an epithet decrying the tyranny and despotism of their political opponents.¹⁰⁸ But by the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, Islam became more complicated and ambiguous in the American imagination. On the one hand, the Islamic world was seen as a formerly grand civilization, and Muslims could be portrayed as likeable characters, but on the other hand negative associations endured.¹⁰⁹ This more complicated view of Islam and Muslims may have served Hi Jolly well when he identified as a Turk and as a Muslim. In spite of the history of American Islamophobia, in early California, race, not religion, ultimately defined one’s right to testify.

Watson’s challenge to Hi Jolly’s right to testify is also consistent with a longer history of social and legal racial categorizations of Arabs and Middle Easterners in the United States. Historians have shown that Arab and Middle Eastern immigrants and ethnics have been legally categorized as Caucasian but popularly viewed as non-White.¹¹⁰ Helen Hatab Samhan writes that in each historical period Arab Americans, and I would extend this category to include Middle Easterners more generally (including Turks, Armenians, and Iranians), “have confronted race-based challenges to their identity . . . [and] an important feature of this discussion is the recurring theme of ‘not quite white.’”¹¹¹ This racial in-betweenness is evident in the challenge to Hi Jolly’s right to testify. In *People v. Watson*, the defendant prevailed on the court to view Hi Jolly as Muslim and

¹⁰⁸ Edward Curtis IV points out that this sentiment was dominant but not ubiquitous.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, Helen Hatab Samhan, “Not Quite White,” John Tehranian, *White Washed: America’s Invisible Middle Eastern Minority* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

¹¹¹ Samhan, “Not Quite White, 209.

therefore not White, but the session court judge rejected this view. As in *Elyea*, Judge Dryden considered Hi Jolly eligible to testify—and therefore White—according to California law.

Philip Tedro

It is safe to assume that *People v. Watson* was not the first time Hi Jolly encountered racism and Islamophobia in the frontier West, and such experiences may have been a catalyst for his transformation to “Philip Tedro,” and to a Greek ethnic identity. Evidence suggests that Hadji Ali metamorphosed into Philip Tedro sometime in the mid-1870s. In the early 1870s, U.S. Army officers still referred to Hi Jolly as “Hadji Ali,”¹¹² but, by February 16, 1877, the *Arizona Weekly Miner* referred to Hi Jolly as “Mr. Phillip Tedro, familiarly known as Hadje Alla.”¹¹³ Since locals still knew him as Hadji Ali, it seems likely that his transformation was a recent one, and may have coincided with a (temporary) leave from government service. Others have suggested that Hi Jolly shapeshifted upon meeting his future wife, Gertrudis Serna, a young Mexican woman who lived in Tucson. Either way, unlike in the Ottoman Empire, where conversion to Islam conveyed economic and political benefits, in the United States, becoming “Philip Tedro,” a European Christian, represented yet another opportunistic transformation. This is not to say that Greek immigrants did not face discrimination and exclusionary social, economic, and immigration policies (as we will see in the next chapter). The American Protective Association, for example, founded in 1887, was both anti-immigrant and anti-

¹¹² Bill Reed, “Fort McDowell—The ‘Most Unhappy Post,’” *Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1976).

¹¹³ *Arizona Weekly Miner*, February 16, 1877.

Catholic, and specifically targeted Southern and Eastern Europeans in the East and Midwest, and fixated on Mexican immigrants in the Southwest.

But distancing himself from the Ottoman realm evaded potential categorization as a “Turk” and “Mohammedan,” but also as “Asiatic,” which during this period threatened exposure to the same exclusionary laws that plagued Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and South Asian immigrants in the American West. By this time, Hi Jolly had lived and worked in the American Southwest for two decades, and had doubtless learned both the benefits and burdens of American racial and ethnic categories. Arizona Territory, where he settled after the Civil War, based its early laws and constitution on those of California, and also enacted stringent testimony laws. The 1865 Howell Code proscribed “black or mulatto, or Indian, Mongolian, or Asiatic” peoples from giving evidence “in favor of or against any white person.”¹¹⁴ Beyond Western states’ exclusionary testimony laws, Asian immigrants also faced significant barriers to economic and social mobility including special taxes on mining and other occupations. Perhaps the most socially devastating were anti-miscegenation laws that, in many Western states including Arizona Territory, barred Black, American Indian, and Asian people from marrying outside of their race. This problem was particularly acute for Asian men, because few Asian women immigrated to the United States, and even fewer journeyed to the remote and transient camps of Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, and elsewhere mining booms drew throngs of men seeking “easy” fortunes, just as Esteban had done centuries before.

¹¹⁴ Andrea Pugsley, “‘As I Kill this Chicken so May I Be Punished if I Tell an Untruth’: Chinese Opposition to Legal Discrimination in Arizona Territory,” *Journal of Arizona History* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 172.

In the late 1860s, Hi Jolly continued to work for the Army Quartermaster's Department, in an on-again, off-again pattern that would characterize his service for the next twenty years or so. In 1868, Hi Jolly rescued some of the abandoned camels and used them to run supplies from Yuma to the Arizona mines around Wellton and Gila Bend, and into the northern Sonoran mines.¹¹⁵ Around the same time, he also reportedly sold water to emigrant travelers along the stagecoach lines. In 1869, Hi Jolly served as Packmaster at Fort McDowell, a position which earned him \$100.00 per month. But only a year later, the army employed him as a "packer" at \$45.00 per month.¹¹⁶ The unpredictability of his military work and wages might have drawn Hi Jolly into his various entrepreneurial ventures, including prospecting. On several occasions, Hi Jolly believed that he had struck it rich, reporting in 1877 that in he had found a fortune in a mine near Black Canyon. But, as it was so for many prospectors, the fruits of his labors in the diggings never seemed to materialize. So, in 1880, Hi Jolly rejoined the army near Tucson in the struggle to capture Geronimo, the Apache warrior and medicine man.¹¹⁷ There he met his future wife, a young Sonoran woman named Gertrudis Serna. That year, "Philip Tidro" appeared in the Great Register of Pima County; the entry states that he was forty-one years of age and a native of Greece.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Nabhan, "Camel Whisperers," 110.

¹¹⁶ Frangos, n.p.

¹¹⁷ Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was not able to research Hi Jolly's role in the Apache Wars. These papers are available at the National Archives, which was closed.

¹¹⁸ Phillip Teadrow (Tedro)/Hi Jolly File, "Information from the Great Registers," Hayden Papers, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

Felipe/“Frijole”

Hi Jolly and Gertrudis Serna married on April 28, 1880, in Tucson, Arizona. According to the marriage register of Tucson, Hi Jolly was married under the name of Felipe Theodoro, son of Santiago and Maria Theodoro of Athens, Greece.¹¹⁹ Their wedding portrait shows Serna, a young, fair-skinned, petite bride in her wedding gown and veil adorned with lace and flowers, her hair neatly curled. Her hand is resting on Hi Jolly’s shoulder, and he is sitting beside her in garb uncharacteristic of his livelihoods, a three-piece-suit and bow tie, with his thick black hair and moustache neatly groomed. In the blurred background of the scene, a stone statue of Cupid poised with his bow lays perpetually in wait of his next victims.¹²⁰ Neither bride nor groom look particularly happy in the photo, in the typical style of nineteenth century wedding photographs. Looking at the grainy black and white image, one wonders how the couple met, whether they were in love, or if the marriage was one born simply from convenience or of social and economic advantage. They may have met through military connections, as Serna’s father, Federico Serna, was a well-known Mexican revolutionary who had fled his home country with his family.

In 1880, Tucson was a burgeoning city of around seven thousand residents, which that year witnessed the arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad, with its promise of economic progress. In those days, marriage between Mexican women and non-Mexican men was common in Arizona Territory and the rest of the Southwest. These interracial

¹¹⁹ Roanna H. Winsor, “Monument to Hi Jolly,” *Arizona Highways*, May 1961, Suleiman Collection, Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

¹²⁰ Philip Tedro and Gertrudis Serna Wedding Photo, April 21, 1880, AHS-SAD #19482, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

and interethnic unions often occurred between older, foreign-born men, and younger Mexican women; Hi Jolly and Serna's marriage followed this common pattern. According to the Great Pima Register, in 1880, Hi Jolly was forty-one years old, and Serna was half his age, only about twenty.¹²¹ While their ages set them nearly a generation apart, they did share some commonalities. Sal Acosta's study of marriage pairings between Mexican women and Anglo-European, Black, and Chinese men shows that these unions were rooted in working class identities. Acosta writes that in Tucson, inter-ethnic relationships took place almost exclusively among working-class partners, primarily between Mexicans and [W]hites, but also between Mexicans and [B]lack or Chinese [people]. . . demonstrating that class similarities can sometimes counterweigh racial difference.¹²²

This was certainly the case for the Tedros; Hi Jolly labored, for a time, as a saddle-maker in Tucson, while Serna worked as a dressmaker.

¹²¹ According to her death certificate, she died in 1936 at the age of around 76, so she was born around 1860.

¹²² Sal Acosta, *Sanctioning Matrimony: Western Expansion and Interethnic Marriage in the Arizona Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 14.



Gertrudis Serna and Filippou Teodora (Hadj Ali) wedding portrait, Tucson, April 21, 1880. AHS-SAD #19482.

Figure 10 Gertrudis Serna and Filippou Teodora (Hadji Ali) wedding portrait, Tucson, April 21, 1880.

Hi Jolly and Serna were ethnically and some might say racially different, but Mexican Americans and Middle Eastern Americans shared a similarly complex and ambiguous racial positioning. At the end of the U.S.-Mexican War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed Mexicans the same rights as their Euro-American counterparts, which entailed Mexicans' legal racial categorization as White. In spite of such guarantees of equality, Mexicans faced significant social and institutional discrimination—like Arabs and Middle Easterners, Mexicans were legally White and often socially non-White. The racial ambiguity of Mexicans enabled Mexican women to marry across the racial spectrum in late nineteenth century Tucson. As White women by law, Mexican women could marry White men, but oftentimes local officials followed popular racial understandings, allowing Mexican women to marry non-White men, in spite of Arizona's stringent anti-miscegenation laws.¹²³ Serna and Hi Jolly shared other similarities as well. Both came from what we might now view as remarkable circumstances: Serna's father, Francisco, had been a customs official in Mexico, and led an insurrection against Sonoran governor Ignacio Pesquiera; the governor triumphed, driving the "*sernistas*" out of Mexico and into Tucson. Like her husband, Gertrudis had likely experienced the danger and bloodshed of war, even in her young life. She and her family were perhaps impressed with stories of Hi Jolly's Camel Corps days and military

¹²³ Acosta, "Sanctioning Matrimony," 23.

exploits against the Apache, tales which Hi Jolly became well known for telling.¹²⁴ Like the Americans, the Mexicans had struggled to make Apache territory their own, and Sonora remained a prime target for Apache raids. Lastly, both Hi Jolly and Serna shared identities as immigrants, although Serna's birthplace, Hermosilla, is a mere 272 miles from Tucson.

The couple started a family, and lived culturally Mexican lives, as was common for men in interethnic marriages with Mexican women. Serna and Hi Jolly had three children: two girls, Amelia and Herminia, born in 1882 and 1883, respectively, and in 1891, Serna gave birth to their son, Fernando Serna Tidro. Like other mixed couples in Tucson, Serna and Hi Jolly gave their children Hispanic names, and the children were most likely baptized at St. Augustine's Cathedral.¹²⁵ Some have written that Hi Jolly's daughters were raised as Muslims, but evidence suggests otherwise.¹²⁶ Their oldest daughter attended St. Augustine's parochial school, and the other two Tedro children probably did as well.¹²⁷ In most cases, in these exogenous unions, marrying a Mexican woman entailed conversion.¹²⁸ A scapular medal found with Hi Jolly's belongings upon his death might be a clue that he converted to Catholicism upon marrying Serna.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Joseph L. Obermuller, *Life and Times of a Mining Engineer, 1864-1947*, n.d., MS 0593, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

¹²⁵ Acosta, *Sanctioning Matrimony*, 134.

¹²⁶ Frangos, "The Turkish Bushwacking of Hi Jolly and Greek George," 2. Frangos polemically claims that Turks have appropriated Greek-American history by writing of Hi Jolly and Greek George as "Ottoman citizens."

¹²⁷ *Arizona Weekly Star*, June 21, 1894.

¹²⁸ Acosta, *Sanctioning Matrimony*, 134.

¹²⁹ Winsor, "Monument to Hi Jolly."

Scapular medals are objects of piety worn primarily by Roman Catholics as open signs of devotion; the most popular, the Brown scapular, for example, expresses a filial relationship to the Virgin Mary and offers her protection to the wearer. The children also celebrated their Mexican heritage. On August 16, 1896, Amelia Tedro sang at a Mexican Independence festival hosted by the local Hispanic American society. In his memoir, Fred Ronstadt recalled the grand celebration Tucson hosted for Mexican Independence Day, including a parade and a great public feast at St. Augustin.¹³⁰ The family most likely spoke Spanish in their home on West 18th Street, and one of his compatriots later remarked that Hi Jolly spoke much better Spanish than English. An 1883 newspaper also reveals another of Hi Jolly's aliases—"Frijole," which is Spanish for "bean," and which by the early twentieth century became a racial epithet for Mexicans.¹³¹ In 1890, Hi Jolly registered as Felipe Tedro, but this time, he did not register in Pima County, where his wife and family lived.¹³²

Hi Jolly tried to create a settled life in Tucson with Serna and their three children, but stints with the army and forays out prospecting were not conducive to family life. Around 1888, Hi Jolly lived for a time with Tom Childs, in Ajo, Arizona. Childs reported that "Old Man High Jolly, the Arab that helped bring [the camels] into this country, came here to Ajo . . . to try to catch some to prospect with."¹³³ It's not clear whether Hi Jolly

¹³⁰ Edward F. Ronstadt, *Borderman: Memoirs of Federico José María Ronstadt* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 115-116.

¹³¹ "Give us the Facts," *Arizona Weekly Star*, August 30, 1883

¹³² Phillip Teadrow (Tedro)/Hi Jolly File, "Information from the Great Registers," Hayden Papers, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

¹³³ "Camels in Arizona and the West," *Arizona Republic*, March 27, 1966.

caught any, but while living there, he liked to reminisce about the old days, and the races he and his camels had won against horses. But long periods of time away from home placed emotional and economic stress on his wife and family. Hi Jolly's daughter, Herminia or "Minnie" Hansford recounted that in his protracted wanderings from home, her father failed to contribute to the support of the family.¹³⁴ This was a common cause of divorce for working class couples in Tucson.¹³⁵ His absence became too much for Serna to bear, and she remained out of contact with Hi Jolly for a period of years, probably after the birth of their son, Fernando, in 1891, eleven years after they married.¹³⁶ Minnie Hansford recalled that the last time they saw their father, he was in a Tucson hospital, and had asked for them to visit him. When he entreated Serna to take him back, "she felt compelled to refuse him."¹³⁷ In the 1900 census, Gertrudis Tedro was listed as a widow, aged forty, and a dressmaker by trade. Her daughters, Amelia and Herminia, were listed as seamstresses, and nine-year-old Fernando, a student.¹³⁸ But Hi Jolly had not yet passed into the next life; perhaps his former wife thought he had died after their visit in the hospital or perhaps his absence, for her, symbolized widowhood.

¹³⁴ Roscoe G. Willson, "Arizona Days with Roscoe G. Willson," *Arizona Days and Ways Magazine*, September 14, 1958.

¹³⁵ Acosta, *Sanctioning Matrimony*, 135.

¹³⁶ Willson, "Arizona Days."

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Gertrude Tedro, Tucson, Pima, Arizona Territory, *1900 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004.

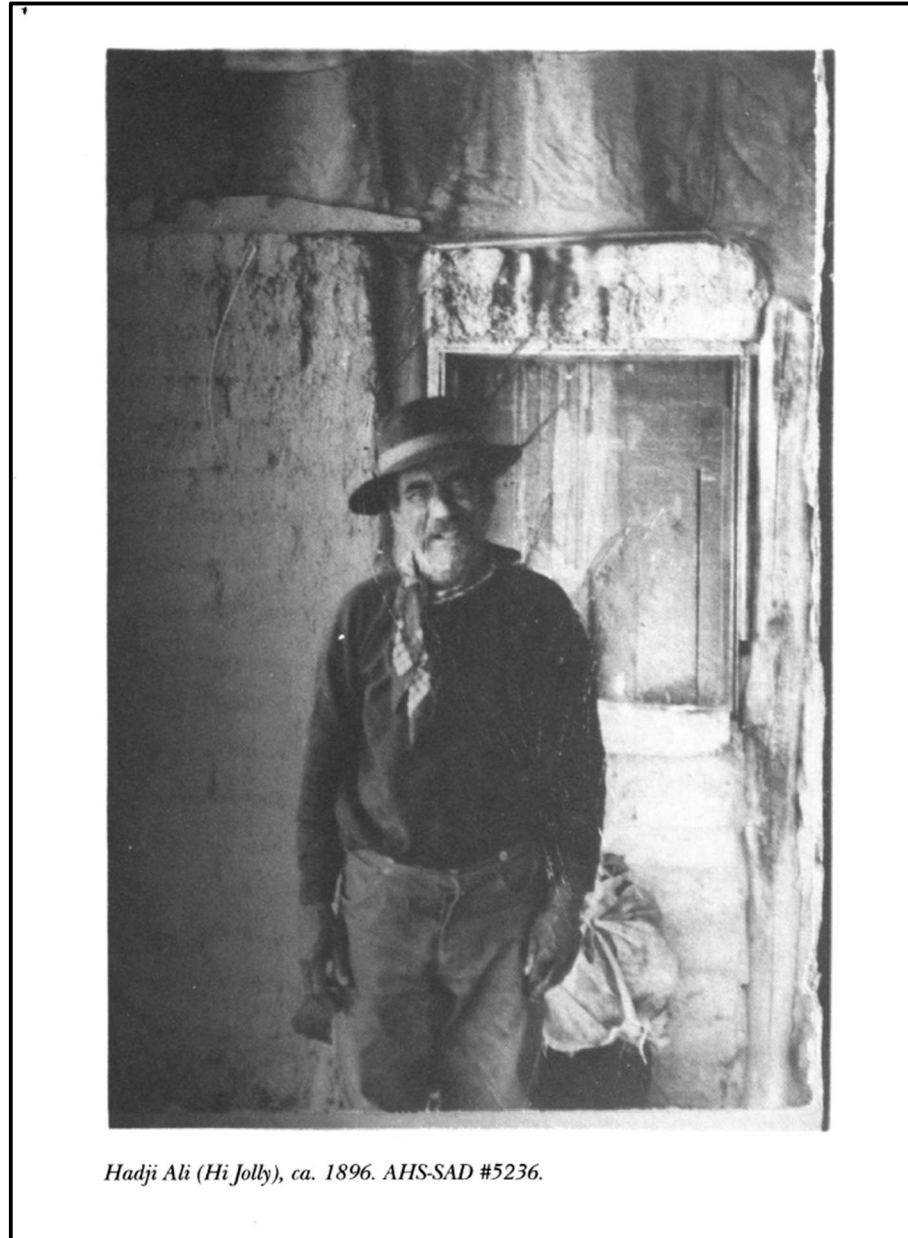


Figure 11 Hadji Ali (Hi Jolly), ca. 1896.

“Old Man Hi Jolly, the Arab”

By the early 1890s, Hi Jolly stationed himself at Tyson’s Well, a mining camp in Southwest Arizona, near the California border. Charles Tyson settled in the area around 1856, building a fort to protect miners from the Indigenous Yavapai (Mohave-Apache) who did not take kindly to the intrusion of Euro-American settlers on their land. Between

1864 and 1866, while Hi Jolly worked for the army, Charles Tyson hand-dug a well and built a stagecoach station that served the route between Ehrenberg and Prescott. The town lay on the Butterfield Overland Mail route, so Hi Jolly probably knew the camp in his days delivering the “jackass mail.” Fred Kuehn, who cared for Hi Jolly in his later years, estimated that Hi Jolly lived there for about a decade before he died in 1902. Eighty years old at the time of the interview, Kuehn told Harriett Farnsworth that Hi Jolly was a familiar figure in the camp, and lived the kind of meager and peripatetic life that miners lived in those days. Hi Jolly inhabited a miner’s shack near the boarding house run by Kuehn’s mother. It was a rough, ten-by-twelve cabin built of weathered lumber, with a dirt floor, and few rustic furnishings including a bed, stove, table, and one or two chairs. According to Kuehn, Hi Jolly and other miners in the area traveled a lot, “but called Fort Tyson home.”¹³⁹ When he was asked about Hi Jolly’s fortunes as a miner, Kuehn chuckled, remarking that if Hi Jolly “had struck it rich anywhere I sure never heard of it. At that time there was plenty of free gold in this area, but Hi Jolly was far too restless to be a good miner.”¹⁴⁰

By 1899, nearly a half century of toil in the desert Southwest rendered Hi Jolly physically unable to earn a livelihood, and he applied for a small pension from the U.S. Army. In the words of Arizona historian and contemporary Mulford Winsor: “He sought no charity. He made his own way while he had strength.”¹⁴¹ In 1901, Hi Jolly wrote a

¹³⁹ Farnsworth, *Pioneers of the Western Frontier* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1968), 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Winsor, “Hi-Jolly,” 8.

letter to Arizona Congressional delegate Marcus A. Smith; he asserted that by the terms of his agreement with the army in 1856, he would be employed “for six months at \$15.00 per month, with the option of remaining in the government employ or being returned to his country at government expense.” Hi Jolly, of course, chose to remain.¹⁴² In 1899, Colonel George B. Sanford, supported Hi Jolly’s petition for a pension, writing that while stationed at Fort McDowell from 1867-1872, Hi Jolly was under his command as chief packmaster and scout; Sanford testified that “the government had agreed to take care of Hi-Jolly as long as he lived” and that “the government has had few more faithful servants in the last half-century.” Generals, senators, and the governor of Arizona Territory all wrote in support of Hi Jolly’s pension, for which he was asking only \$15.00 per month, the wage he had originally contracted for when he was in his twenties. But the government ultimately declined his petition because Hi Jolly was “not a citizen of the United States. He had suffered no injury in the Apache War. [And] No written contract was on record.”¹⁴³ Sources claim that Hi Jolly had been naturalized in Missouri in 1857 or in San Antonio, Texas, in 1880, but no evidence of his naturalization record could be found.

In her interview with Kuehn, Farnsworth asked about Hi Jolly’s origins and the circumstances of his death. When asked whether Hi Jolly was Syrian or Armenian, Kuehn confidently replied that he was neither: “Hi Jolly always said he was an Arab and stuck to it. The mistake about his nationality got started when he and Greek George were picked up as camel drivers in Syria. Hi Jolly said he just happened to be in Syria when

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

the U.S. government men were there looking for experienced drivers.”¹⁴⁴ Like the commemorative plaque on Hi Jolly’s monument, Kuehn probably meant to say “Smyrna,” not “Syria,” but we will never really know.

Though Hi Jolly did die poor, he did not die alone. The residents of Tyson’s Well cared for the old man in his final years. Fred Kuehn’s uncle, Mike Wetch, owned the local general store and extended Hi Jolly credit, knowing full well that the old man could never repay him; the final tally of his bill came to \$600.00. Although Kuehn and other local youngsters mocked Hi Jolly’s large nose and limping gait, they also took care of him. Kuehn’s mother ran the local boardinghouse, and made sure Hi Jolly got “three squares daily,” which a teenaged Kuehn delivered when Hi Jolly was too frail to walk. Kuehn asserted that though Hi Jolly was penniless, he was not destitute, he was “rich in more than the material things in life.” When asked if Hi Jolly died in a sandstorm trying to capture one of his wild camels, Kuehn retorted, “Hearsay—all pure hearsay! Nothing could be further from the truth!” Kuehn told Farnsworth that on December 16, 1902, he went to Hi Jolly’s shack with a breakfast tray, and the old man had died in his sleep. Kuehn’s stepfather built Hi Jolly a coffin out of lumber they had on hand, and his brother dug a grave in the town’s cemetery.¹⁴⁵ There was no church or preacher, no singing, and no funeral, and though most of the miners were away in the diggings, a dozen friends accompanied the old camel driver to his final resting place.

¹⁴⁴ Farnsworth, *Pioneers of the Western Frontier*, 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12.



Figure 12 Fred Kuehn's grave is located a few yards from Hi Jolly's monument. Photo by author, Quartzite, Arizona.

**PART TWO: SYRIAN IMMIGRANTS AND SETTLERS IN THE ASIAN
EXCLUSION ERA**

CHAPTER THREE: TRAILS AND FENCES: SYRIAN MIGRATION NETWORKS AND IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION, 1885-1911

In 1907, thirty-five year old Syrian immigrant named Aisha Mostafa crossed the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso in order to reach the United States.¹ At the same time, U.S. immigration inspectors Marcus Braun and Alcibiades A. Seraphic mounted undercover investigations into the illegal entry of Syrian immigrants across the southern border. Braun traveled to Ottoman Syria, Egypt, France, and Mexico, trailing Syrian migrants on their labyrinthine journeys, while Seraphic voyaged south of the border to gather information on the “illegitimate and irregular” traffic of immigrants via Mexico. Like Mostafa, after 1902, a flood of Syrians entered the United States over the southern border; in 1906 alone, 4,000 of the 27,000 passengers who disembarked at Veracruz were Syrian immigrants bound for the United States.² As Seraphic reported, “Syrians had not selected this roundabout route of travel either from a desire to enjoy a long sea voyage or for reasons of economy,” but to escape the strict regime of interrogation and medical examination at U.S. and Canadian ports of entry. Increasingly stringent inspections at Ellis Island after 1891, and tightening restrictions along the U.S.-Canadian border, compelled Syrians to take their chances in Mexico where there existed “a regular industry of smuggling and assisting foreigners to enter the United States.”³ The inspectors reported

¹ Edward E. Curtis IV, manuscript, “Heartland Muslim: A Syrian History of the American Midwest,” 51.

² Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: “Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930.” Rudolph Vecoli and Alan Kraut, eds. (Bethesda: University Publications of America), 1993. Microfilm.

³ *Ibid.*

evidence of disease among Syrian immigrants in Mexico, but they also found an epidemic of *padronism* that threatened to bring the scourge of “slavery” back into the United States. Following the immigrants from Veracruz to Mexico City, Laredo, Matamoros, Torreon, and elsewhere, the inspectors saw a stream of newcomers ensnared in the webs of Syrian *padrones*.

Braun and Seraphic were enforcing a spate of new immigration restrictions. In the late nineteenth century, Congress erected the first fences to exclude immigrants, barring Chinese laborers and laying the foundation for further restrictions.⁴ Shortly after Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1885 Foran Act banned all contract laborers. In 1891, Congress defined additional excludable categories including: individuals carrying “loathsome and contagious diseases,” and those “likely to become public charges,” among other categories. This story of Syrian migration shifts the enquiry on Asian immigration restriction from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and 1924 National Origins Act to the intervening years and from East Asian to West Asian migrants. While Syrians were never explicitly barred, contract labor, disease, and poverty were powerful codes for racialization and exclusion that, in practice, targeted them.⁵

⁴ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Erika Lee has pointed out that the Chinese Exclusion Act transformed the U.S. from a nation that welcomed all immigrants into a “gatekeeping nation” that eventually barred “all other Asian immigrants and maintained an exclusionary and racialized identity that marked Asians, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans as outsiders.”⁴ But Lee does not consider Syrians who managed to escape exclusionary measures that targeted other Asian groups, highlighting Syrians’ racial ambiguity and the unstable boundaries between Asian and non-Asian, White and non-White.

⁵ On the racialization of labor and class see: James Barrett and David Roediger, “The Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16:2 (Spring 1997): 3-44; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); on the racialization of disease and public health: Alan Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the Immigrant Menace* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); John

In the realm of immigration law, Syrians occupied an intermediate racial status, positioned somewhere in-between Southern Europeans and East Asians. Like the “new” European immigrants, Syrians were targeted by immigration restrictions aimed at contract laborers, carriers of disease, and the poor, and Syrian patterns of illegal immigration across the Mexican and Canadian borders closely mirrored the clandestine crossings of Chinese, Japanese, and Greek immigrants during this period.⁶ Syrians were also rhetorically positioned between Southern Europeans and East Asians. While many faced challenging obstacles on their journeys to the United States, Syrians were never barred outright as were other Asian immigrants; in this way and others, Syrians greatly benefitted from their proximity to Whiteness.

Tracking the trails blazed by Syrian immigrants, Braun and Seraphic’s investigations reveal dynamic networks of Syrian entrepreneurs who facilitated and profited from immigrants’ protracted journeys to the Americas. For these entrepreneurs, the key to the golden gates lay not in crossing the border but in guiding others along the way. From steamships in Beirut to boardinghouses on the border, agents, merchants, interpreters, and boardinghouse operators sometimes hindered immigrants as much as they helped. As Braun and Seraphic’s investigations revealed, networks that assisted Syrians on their

McKiernan-González, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas-Mexico Border, 1848-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Ann R. Gabbert, “El Paso, A Sight for Sore Eyes: Medical and Legal Aspects of Syrian Immigration, 1906-1907,” *The Historian* 65, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 15-42.

⁶ See Lee; Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Dorothee Schneider, *Crossing Borders: Migration and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

trans-Atlantic and trans-border crossings also created treacherous conditions that could lead to exclusion at America's gates. As the inspectors' reports demonstrate, these networks often channeled Syrian immigrants into labor contracts, poverty, illness, and ultimately exclusion. Thus, while the press, policymakers, and immigration officials racialized poor, sick, and indentured immigrants, such conditions were often contracted en route.

This chapter engages with and expands on a burgeoning literature on race and migration in Arab American and Middle Eastern studies. Reflecting decades of ethnic studies scholarship and shifts in U.S. immigration history, studies of Arab American assimilation have given way to analyses of race and racial ambivalence—that Arab Americans are and have been “not quite White” in U.S. racial hierarchies.⁷ This literature has centered on the racial prerequisite cases, which delivered Syrians probationary White status by 1914.⁸ As Gualtieri has pointed out, however, Syrian racial liminality was

⁷ On assimilation see: Philip Kayal and Joseph Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1975); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab American Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); on race and racism: Nabeel Abraham, “Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States,” in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernest McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Lisa Suhair Majaj, “Arab Americans and the Meaning of Race” in *Postcolonial Theory in the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, eds. Amritjit Singh, and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000): 320-337.

⁸ See Helen Hatab Samhan, “Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab-American Experience,” in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Majaj, “Meaning of Race;” Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*; Khaled Beydoun, “Between Muslim and White: The Legal Construction of Arab American Identity,” *New York University Annual Survey of American Law* 29 (2013): 1-35.

readily apparent in other contexts as well.⁹ Before the racial prerequisite cases threatened Syrians' right to naturalize, official threats of exclusion occurred in Congress and at America's gates and borders. Thus, before Syrian Whiteness was adjudicated and affirmed in the courts, immigration restrictions deemed many ineligible for entry onto American soil and into the American body politic.

This study of Syrian immigrant networks also engages with developments in the field of Middle East migration studies.¹⁰ For more than two decades, scholars have liberated their research from the staid confines of the area studies paradigm to embrace transnational perspectives. Expanding Middle Eastern studies to consider the lives of migrants, Andrew Arsan, John Karam, and Akram Khater have proposed a view from the diaspora that reimagines the Middle East as "less a clear territorial package than a set of networks holding together, and held together by, people and things, places and practices" that span the globe.¹¹ This story exemplifies this perspective, as migration networks linked settled and transient Arab populations from Greater Syria to North Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America, and elsewhere.

While these migrants' histories transcend national borders, the fences that demarcated the borders and the trails that defied them had profound consequences for Syrian

⁹ Gualtieri, 4.

¹⁰ See Akram Fouad Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 13:2/3 (Fall/Winter 2005): 299-331; Andrew Arsan, John Karam, Akram Khater, "On Forgotten Shores: Migration in Middle East Studies and the Middle East in Migration Studies," editorial forward, *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1:1 (2013): 1-7; Stacy Fahrenthold, "Transnational Modes and the Media: The Syrian Press in the Mahjar and Emigrant Activism during World War I," *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1:1 (2013): 30-54.

¹¹ Arsan, Karam, Khater, "Forgotten Shores," 7.

immigrants. These trails and fences both united and separated them from family and opportunity in the United States. Tracing immigrants' serpentine journeys from Ottoman Syria to the U.S. threshold highlights the physical, emotional, and financial challenges of migration, but also networks and communities forged along the way. Beyond legislation, institutions, bureaucrats, and economies that both restricted and facilitated migration lay the tragic, joyous, and frustrating stories of thousands of individuals seeking to reunite with family and to improve the quality of their lives.

Raising Fences

Syrian immigration shaped and was shaped by immigration restrictions. But U.S. immigration laws were not the only obstacles frustrating Syrian immigrants' paths; the Ottoman government erected barriers to exit. Initially, Ottoman officials prohibited out-migration to preserve population and desperately needed tax income, but restrictions also aimed to protect Ottoman prestige abroad. Turkhan Bey, the Ottoman consul in Barcelona, feared that Syrian peasants migrated to the Americas to become beggars, a view that strongly echoed perceptions in the United States.¹² But such restrictions were relatively easy to overcome, as Ottoman officials extorted bribes from immigrants seeking passage. Eventually, the government was so alarmed by the rate of out-migration from Mount Lebanon that they denied passports, required travelers to post bonds, stationed military police on roads and at ports, and prevented passenger ships from docking at Beirut.

¹² Kemal H. Karpat, "Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17:2 (May 1985): 186.

Just as the Ottoman government proscribed exit, a growing regime of restrictions in the United States raised fences to prevent entry. Congress passed the Foran Act in 1885, as foreign workers flooded the United States seeking economic opportunity. Rising labor unrest and an economic slump in the 1880s exacerbated tensions and nativism, compelling politicians and reformers to take a “long, hard, new look at the immigrants.”¹³ Strife between capital and labor manifested in the growing visibility of the Knights of Labor (KOL), led by Terence Powderly, who by the late 1890s held the high post of United States Immigration Commissioner. Powderly’s government position highlights the links between labor protection and immigration restriction, as unions, economists, and officials increasingly viewed immigrant labor competition as a threat to the American workingman’s standard of living.¹⁴

Discontent among American workers sparked agitation against contract labor and *padronism*. Immigrant labor contracts were typically organized by savvy members of ethnic groups; they were individuals who had migrated earlier, understood English better, and had established connections with employers in the United States. These contractors forged transnational labor markets for considerable profits and social prestige.¹⁵ Italian labor contractors were called *padroni*, leading the press and policy makers to characterize all such figures as “*padrones*.” *Padronism* varied and changed over time; some *padrones* charged simple fees for their services, while others trapped their clients in more complex

¹³ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁵ See Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

systems of debt peonage. In 1884, the Knights of Labor lobbied Congress to halt the importation of ““large numbers of degraded, ignorant, brutal . . . foreign serfs.””¹⁶ By 1885, Congress passed the Foran Act with the support of both parties, forbidding anyone from prepaying the transportation costs of another in return for services to be rendered upon arrival. Two years later, Congress bolstered the law with the creation of a new position, the contract labor inspector, whose job entailed questioning arrivals on their plans for employment. John Higham has noted sardonically, that “[t]o have a job before entering the country was becoming more reprehensible than to be unemployed afterward.”¹⁷

Like slavery and coolie labor, *padronism* was racialized, and associated with “off-White” and non-White Southern European, Mexican, and Asian laborers. As Gunther Peck has shown, the press, public officials, and progressive reformers reacted to the coercive nature of the *padrone* system by casting it as an archaic “old world” labor regime anathema to American free labor. But as a labor system born from the exigencies of migration, the *padrone* system was native to North America.¹⁸ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the press and public officials portrayed Syrian peddlers as unfree laborers unfit for self-government, two tropes commonly ascribed to racialized groups.¹⁹

¹⁶ Higham, 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸ Peck, 16.

¹⁹ See Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines* and Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Charges of *padronism* colored late nineteenth century press reports warning readers of the threat Syrian peddlers and beggars posed, and were often presented in racial terms, typically in relation to Southern Europeans and East Asians. The press and public officials characterized *padronism* as “confined to those races which have little aptitude for acquiring a working knowledge of English,” and described peddlers as *lazzaronis*,²⁰ mendicants, chattels, and slaves who are “methodically shipped to this country to work for masters.” Like Chinese laborers, Syrian peddlers were perceived in Orientalist terms as passive, cunning, and indolent subjects.²¹ A *Los Angeles Times* report called Syrian peddlers pests illegally imported and “transplanted from an unlimited Oriental monarchy”; the reporter noted that as such, “it is scarcely to be expected that they will understand American institutions.”²² An 1890 *New York Times* exposé purported to explain the origins of peddling under *padrones* as a result of the unscrupulous teachings of Jesuit priests, reflecting anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant strains of American nativism.²³ Syrian Maronites ostensibly emulated Jesus Christ by living on the generosity of others; such a doctrine, the *Times* proclaimed, could hardly be “more welcome to people naturally indolent and not endowed by nature with any breadth of intellect.”²⁴ The Maronites made so much money, the *Times* reported, that “some of the shrewder ones

²⁰ Naples Lazzaroni refers to the poorest classes of Naples, some of whom were beggars.

²¹ Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 283.

²² “Congress to Tackle Immigration the Immigration Problem,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 9, 1898.

²³ “Sanctified Arab Tramps: Wretched Maronite Beggars Infesting this Country,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1890.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

conceived of the idea of making mendicancy, combined with peddling, a regular business” under the control of “moneyed men in Syrian ports [who] organized an extensive *padrone* system” that shipped professional beggars and tramps to the United States to do their bidding.²⁵ The report compared the lesser-known Syrians with more familiar, but by no means less suspect, immigrant groups saying, “[i]n clannishness and outlandish manners these people resemble the Chinese and what are called the Diego Italians... and in many respects they are inferior to the Chinese and Italians, who do possess a certain amount of self-respect, and are willing to work honestly and work hard for a living.”²⁶ Other sources engaged stereotypes of desert-dwelling Arabs, calling the peddlers “nomadic serfs” who “like the Arab of the desert . . . silently fold their tents and steal away at the will of their masters.”²⁷ This supposed threat was not confined to the odious immigrant enclaves of New York and Chicago; by 1890 the West Coast press reported that a veritable army of “poor Syrian chattels” had spread “a social condition which can hardly be defined from slavery” to cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tacoma, and Spokane.²⁸

Pioneering Arab American historians Philip Hitti and Alixa Naff refuted charges of *padronism* among early Syrian immigrants. Naff remarked that, “[h]ad it ever been attempted, it seems doubtful that the *padrone* system would have been effective against

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Syrian Chattels: A Species of Serfdom in this City,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 14, 1891.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the individualism and competitiveness of Syrians in America.”²⁹ While *padronism* as an exploitative system of debt peonage probably did not exist between suppliers and peddlers in the United States, suppliers served similar functions as labor recruiters, bankers, moneylenders, post offices, and interpreters.

In 1889, a Special House Committee inquired into alleged violations of the immigration ban on contract laborers and paupers. The Committee revealed the growing problem of unlawful crossings at the Canadian border, where “no inspection whatever” was made, and where “in many instances immigrants coming by steamer to Quebec have within forty-eight hours after their arrival there been applicants for shelter in the almshouses of the State of New York.”³⁰ Michigan was another hot spot for illegal crossings, overflowing Wayne County’s charitable institutions and prompting construction of a costly almshouse. Dr. Charles S. Hoyt, Secretary of the New York Board of Charities, testified to the burden of “improper immigration” on public coffers. Hoyt suggested that inspectors should be stationed at Canadian ports and on trains bound for the United States, and he presciently noted that “the time is not far distant when we will have to look to Mexico also.”³¹

While Syrians migrated in far lower numbers than Europeans and East Asians, they did not fly under the Committee’s radar. The Chairman of the Immigration Committee interviewed Syrian immigrant Nasief Abonazin at Castle Garden. The Chairman was particularly interested in the young Syrian’s plans for employment. Abonazin hedged on

²⁹ Naff, 221.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

the question. Inspectors could only bar immigrants on the grounds of contract labor if they admitted to having an explicit promise of employment; networks alerted immigrants to such pitfalls, so few made this detrimental mistake.³² Abonazin said that he planned to work with his cousin at a brick yard and peddling, but quickly added, “I don’t know anything about it.”³³ Finally, the Chairman inquired as to how much money Abonazin possessed. “Show money” was critical for gaining entry at American ports; one without sufficient cash on hand could be denied entry on the grounds of pauperism. Abonazin skated by with his four and a half francs. One government investigator pointed out the contradictions of the system saying, “If the immigrant cannot support himself he is sent back as liable to become a public charge. If he has provided beforehand for self-support he is sent back as liable to displace American workingmen.”³⁴

By the early 1890s, nativists, reformers, and Republican politicians made concerted efforts to further restrict the flow of immigrants. The 1891 Immigration Act did not aim to reduce the overall number of immigrants; rather, it made immigration more selective by creating new categories of exclusion. Broadening 1882 and 1885 restrictions on Chinese laborers, paupers, criminals, and contract laborers, the new law excluded (among others) persons likely to become public charges, persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease...and also any person whose ticket or passage is paid for

³² Peck, 86.

³³ U.S. House, *Select Committee Report to Inquire into the Alleged Violation of the Laws Prohibiting the Importation of Contract Laborers, Paupers, Convicts, and Other Classes*, 50th Congress, 2nd sess., 1889, H. Rep. 3792, 243.

³⁴ Peck, 87.

with the money of another or who is assisted by others to come, unless it is affirmatively and satisfactorily shown on special inquiry that such person does not belong to one of the foregoing excluded classes, or to any class of contract laborers excluded by the act of February 26, 1885.³⁵

The LPC clause was initially designed to exclude the disabled, but in its new form it barred the poor more generally. The proscription on contract laborers was strengthened to bar those who migrated in response to employers' advertisements, which were also made illegal. The law compelled steamship companies, long seen as powerful catalysts for migration, to return rejected immigrants back to Europe at their own expense, "making private ticket agents the most effective immigration inspectors."³⁶ The law was bolstered by stricter enforcement through interrogations and medical examinations to weed out suspected carriers of disease.

Unlike contract labor violations, which immigrants could evade simply by denying they had secured employment, dodging medical examinations aboard steamships and at American ports of entry was a wholly different proposition. Trachoma and favus, considered to be the most prevalent diseases afflicting immigrants, were closely associated with Syrians. As Ann Gabbert has shown, although immigration restrictions aimed to bar diseased individuals, in practice, public health officials used such laws to target particular racial and ethnic groups.³⁷ The U.S. Health Service placed Syrians at the top of the list of probable carriers of trachoma, alongside Southern and Eastern

³⁵ U.S. House, 1891, 51st Congress, 2nd sess., 3 March.

³⁶ Higham, 100.

³⁷ Gabbert, 16.

Europeans and other Asians, the same groups associated with *padronism*.³⁸ In the late nineteenth century, many believed that these diseases were biologically linked to certain races and ethnicities, and were visible manifestations of moral failings, illiteracy, and filth, rather than to the prevailing conditions in one's country of origin or on the voyage to America itself.³⁹

In addition to new and more stringent restrictions, the 1891 law radically reshaped the administration of immigration.⁴⁰ The law centralized the Bureau of Immigration under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government, created the position of the Superintendent of Immigration, and provided for twenty-four immigration inspectors. Finally, the 1891 law instituted the first general deportation law since 1798, “[t]hus, a sort of catch basin was added to the sieve mechanism” of immigration restriction.⁴¹

Blazing Trails

If immigration restrictions raised fences, they were nothing if not permeable. The Canadian border initially provided an alternate route, but enforcement measures coupled with the reality of deportation made the Canadian corridor increasingly treacherous. In 1901, the Immigration Bureau reorganized administration along the northern border, placing inspector Robert Watchorn at the helm. By 1902 Watchorn had successfully fortified the border between Michigan and Maine; exclusions at Canadian ports for 1901-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴⁰ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 35.

⁴¹ Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 115.

1902 exceeded those of all other U.S. ports of entry combined, numbering 2,028 of 4,985 immigrants excluded—812 as paupers, 496 for disease, and 419 as contract laborers.⁴²

In one tragic case, Alexandria Joseph, a Syrian woman who had already twice been deported, journeyed through Canada to reunite with her fiancé. According to press reports her betrothed had saved enough money to “lead his old world sweetheart to the altar,” when she was refused admittance at Montreal for trachoma.⁴³ The couple attempted to “run the gauntlet of the inspectors” and were apprehended in Detroit. He was released, but Joseph remained in custody. On the Michigan Central passenger train, “driven to desperation by the prospect of being forever separated from her lover, in the expectation of marrying whom she had nearly circled the globe,” Joseph threw herself from the train “in a supreme effort to escape from the U.S. immigration agent who was about to deport her.”⁴⁴ When the train rolled back, Immigration Agent Cameron Miller found her body lying lifeless by the tracks. After 1902, Syrian immigrants increasingly turned to the U.S.-Mexico border fearing rejection and deportation.⁴⁵

Between 1903 and 1907, the Immigration Bureau investigated the illegal traffic of immigrants across the U.S.-Mexico border. Immigration inspectors Marcus Braun and Alcibiades Seraphic trailed Syrian immigrants across the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Mexico, uncovering a network of agents, businesses, and smugglers aiding and abetting

⁴² Ettinger, 82.

⁴³ “Young Syrian Girl Prefers Violent Death to Life Without Love, *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, September 26, 1902. “Girl Leaps to Her Death,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, September 26, 1902.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ettinger, 104.

Syrian immigration. Alixa Naff described it as “a network of self-contained, spontaneous, interdependent, entrepreneurial services whose component parts reached from the homeland across the Atlantic.”⁴⁶

Braun and Seraphic’s roles as immigration agents in the service of a state apparatus bent on exclusion warrants a critical examination of the accounts they produced. Braun’s statements baldly reflect the nativist sentiments of the time, in spite of the fact that he himself was a Jewish Hungarian immigrant. Seraphic, a Greek American working undercover, was also determined to bar those among the excluded classes. Their reports reveal how contract labor, poverty, and disease cast Syrian immigrants as “undesirables,” feeding the racialized narratives around immigration, and ultimately providing Congress with arguments for further exclusions. At the same time, though perhaps biased, the reports offer a window into the challenging realities facing Syrian immigrants in the early twentieth century. Taken at face value, Braun and Seraphic show how the networks could be exploitative, even to the extent that they created conditions of poverty, indenture, illness, and exclusion. Reading between the lines, they also suggest the ways in which migration networks helped Syrian immigrants.

On March 5, 1904, Inspector Marcus Braun boarded the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* in New York, traveling to Europe and the Mediterranean to investigate the catalysts of migration from Southern and Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Braun raised alarm bells reporting “incontrovertible evidence, that...immigrants inadmissible for reasons other than disease are constantly brought into this country in large numbers by...

⁴⁶ Naff, 95.

steamship agencies, by bankers, and schemers of all sorts.”⁴⁷ While he concluded that Western European nations used the United States as a dumping ground for their unwanted masses, in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Syria, the promotion of immigration seemed of a very different sort, as “the business is attended to by societies and private individuals existing and residing partly in the United States and partly in the countries enumerated.”⁴⁸ The business of migration from Syria was just that—a business—networks of individuals who could facilitate immigration for those willing to pay the price.

According to Braun, the emigrant agent was the primary individual responsible for migration, and “partakes of the romantic and the ways of the brigand.”⁴⁹ Philip Hitti pointed to steamship agents as important catalysts for Syrian immigration, noting wryly that “[t]he sight of a well-groomed agent on donkey-back visiting one village after another has been more or less a familiar sight in the interior of the country.”⁵⁰ Representatives from a steamship company encouraged Mohammed “Ed” Aryain to borrow the \$120 fare to immigrate. Steamship agents were closely allied with others including boatmen and consular guards (*kawasses*), whose assistance in evading Ottoman immigration restrictions was imperative. Local officials informed Braun that employees

⁴⁷ *Certain Reports of Immigrant Inspector Marcus Braun*, House of Representatives, 59th Congress, 1st sess., 1906, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), 54.

of the various consuls also aided immigrants in violation of both Ottoman and U.S. immigration laws.

Restrictions only seemed to encourage evasion and corruption, fueling a lucrative business among entrepreneurs who were savvy enough to subvert the law. Agents arranged for boatmen to transport immigrants from shore to steamer. In one case, a group of seventy-two immigrants from Ayn Arab met agents in Mount Lebanon to be smuggled out of the country. One immigrant remembered how agents, under the cover of darkness, “bribed three Turkish officials and put us in an open boat which took us to Cyprus where we boarded a French ship which reached Marseilles twelve days later.”⁵¹ Small boats illegally shuttled immigrants to passenger ships anchored outside Ottoman waters, for a price. Braun wrote of one boatman who, “after having rowed his human freight about half the distance extending from shore to steamer, stops the boat and demands another fifty francs...threatening that if the money were not forthcoming at once he would row back and hand his passengers over to the police authorities. This usually has the desired effect, and is instrumental in stripping the would-be passenger of every penny he may still have in his possession.”⁵²

Braun reported that steamship agents also overcharged Syrians. Most booked passage from Beirut to Port Said or Alexandria; from these ports, an immigrant would catch the CGT or Cunard Lines to Marseille and New York. One agent in Port Said offered Braun a ticket and the name of a contact in the U.S. for 240 francs. According to Braun the ordinary price of passage from Beirut to New York via Marseille was only 300 francs,

⁵¹ Naff, 96.

⁵² Braun Report, 16-17.

“yet not one of these poor, wretched Syrians can make the journey for less than 400 francs.”⁵³ Braun remarked that steamship agents treated the immigrants like “so many pieces of freight,” shuttling them from their offices in Beirut with letters of introduction to their associates in Marseille who eagerly awaited their arrival.

After leaving Syria and traveling through Egypt, immigrants moved on to Naples or Marseille where they arranged travel to the U.S., Canada, or Mexico; these way stations could also be perilous places for unsuspecting immigrants. In Marseille, Braun found a half dozen steamship companies, each with its own runner. Runners awaited arrivals and assisted immigrants in booking passage to the Americas and locating other critical services. Anton Fares, one of Marseille’s principal runners published the Syrian weekly *Al-Mircad*. In Arabic, the word *al mirsad* means “the observatory” or “the lookout,” suggesting that the newspaper would help immigrants spot the potential dangers that lie ahead; but the word, along with the Arabic *waqafa bi*, has a secondary meaning, “to lie in ambush for someone, waylay someone.”⁵⁴ The two meanings perfectly illustrate the nature of these migration networks. While on the one hand, the individuals and businesses that formed the networks guided their clients and facilitated the journey, they also preyed upon them, extorting money and other valuables. Naff observed that Syrian agents, merchants, bounders, and men of all shades of good and evil were thrown together in Marseilles which...teemed with emigrants, each a prospective patron or dupe.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 347.

With few exceptions, these entrepreneurs were bent on fortunes in a boom era with little concern for how—only for how much.⁵⁵

Fares was not associated with one line directly, but as the primary Syrian contact in Marseille, his services were sought after by several steamship companies and other businesses that served the immigrant trade. For Syrian immigrants, Fares was an indispensable contact whose knowledge could mean the difference between entry and exclusion. To the immigration inspector, by contrast, he was “one of the most dangerous and unscrupulous men in the business.”⁵⁶

In Marseilles, Braun feverishly proclaimed that the influx of Syrian contract laborers had assumed epidemic proportions, and he suspected none other than Anton Fares in these “nefarious” schemes. He was disturbed to discover that Syrian Americans traveled back to their home villages, returning to the United States with ten or twenty of their compatriots in tow.⁵⁷ Peddling suppliers were integral to the network, encouraging and enabling migration. Braun inculpated three such suppliers as the “chief offenders”—T. G. Azar of Saint Louis, Missouri; Abdulah Shehin, of New York City; and Fera and Teen, of Fort Wayne, Indiana. If Braun’s investigation indicted these suppliers, they were crucial contacts for immigrants. The stories of Syrian immigrants testify to the central roles of suppliers in migration networks who were often the first and last links in the network’s transnational chain. Immigration authorities required immigrants to give the name of a

⁵⁵ Naff, 99.

⁵⁶ U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report the Commissioner General of Immigration for the Fiscal Year of 1903* (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 1903.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

friend or relative in the U.S. as a prerequisite for entry. Ed Aryain was given the name of a Syrian supplier who outfitted him as a peddler upon his arrival.⁵⁸ Although the fifteen-year-old may have been unaware, a promise of employment violated U.S. immigration laws.

In addition to contract labor violations, Braun found Marseille to be a “‘hotbed’ for the deflection of...diseased immigrants.”⁵⁹ Runners like Anton Fares escorted their charges to various locations to be examined and classified. In Marseille, Braun awaited the arrival of a steamer from Beirut which he found carrying 700 Syrian immigrants bound for the United States. Fares and another runner by the name of Melhem Eskaf conducted the group to a physician on the Rue des Treize Escalliers. Immigrants deemed healthy received instructions to embark from the usual ports of Havre or Boulogne, and those afflicted with trachoma or favus “are then thoroughly instructed...to embark at St. Nazaire, France, and sail...for Vera Cruz, Mexico... those emigrants are then escorted across the Mexican border to the United States by friends or people with whom [Fares] is connected in a business way.”⁶⁰ Braun characterized this party of Syrian immigrants as a “horde,” a late nineteenth century racist slur commonly employed by American nativists who viewed Asian immigration as a threat—the Yellow Peril.

What Braun called the “Mexican back door” were trails established by runners in Marseilles, Naples, and other Mediterranean ports. He found that Syrians “constitute the

⁵⁸ Ed Aryain, *From Syria to Seminole: Memoir of a High Plains Merchant* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2006), 38.

⁵⁹ Bureau of Immigration, Annual Report 1903, 88.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

bulk of the *European* aliens that seek admission over the Mexican border” [emphasis added].⁶¹ Braun questioned Mexican and Cuban consuls, and the manager of the CGT Line, all of whom verified Fares’ statement. They confirmed that no fewer than 250 Syrian immigrants left St. Nazaire on the twenty-first of each month bound for the United States through Veracruz. Braun found the situation “so alarming” that he sent a cablegram to the Immigration Bureau “suggesting a close watch on the Mexican border,” especially to CGT steamers plying between St. Nazaire, Marseille, and Veracruz. Braun then booked passage to Veracruz on the *Prinz August Wilhelm*; onboard, he suspected that nearly fifty percent of his fellow passengers were afflicted with trachoma. In his 1911 novel *The Book of Khalid*, Ameen Rihani wrote, “now that the purse is empty, the poor emigrant is permitted to leave [Marseille]. They send him to New York with much gratitude in his heart and a little trachoma in his eyes.”⁶²

After a brief stay at Veracruz, Braun and his shipmates were directed to the storefront of Kuri Primos in Mexico City, where they received instructions for crossing the border. Primos distributed tickets, mail, and coached migrants in minute detail as to “how and at what particular point to enter the United States.”⁶³ Like their Chinese counterparts, Syrian immigrants often opted for clandestine crossings at irregular points on the line. “One of the most favored tricks resorted to,” wrote Braun, “consisted in purchasing a Mexican sombrero; if questioned, the wearer would say in Spanish that he was a Mexican (the only

⁶¹ INS Records, “Mexican Immigration.”

⁶² Ameen Fares Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, (New York, 1911), 32.

⁶³ Braun Report, 25.

sentence in Spanish he would learn); and thus attempt to cross the border.”⁶⁴ Excluded Chinese migrants also used racial disguises, posing as Mexicans and Native Americans.⁶⁵ Similarly, dark and olive-complected Syrians were uniquely positioned to masquerade as Mexicans in the racial landscape of the Southwest borderlands. The oral histories of many Syrians confirm this strategy. One Syrian immigrant in North Dakota remembered “wearing a sombrero on the bridge between the two countries.”⁶⁶ But such schemes were not always successful. In El Paso, eight Syrians were apprehended trying to cross with a group of Mexican laborers.⁶⁷ Other Syrian hopefuls posed as “intoxicated Mexicans” riding on a smuggler’s hack. Braun estimated that such wily methods of subterfuge carried 5,000 “unwholesome” Syrians yearly across the United States’ southern threshold.

Braun defined two categories of undesirables: the diseased and contract laborers. Contract laborers were far more difficult to detect, according to Braun, as “defects not visible to the eye, and in which cases we have nothing to rely upon excepting the information coming from the immigrant himself.”⁶⁸ If many suspected that Syrian peddlers labored for *padrones* in the United States, it seemed as though the same corrupt system thrived south of the border as well. Inspector Seraphic’s undercover investigation

⁶⁴ Braun Report, 27.

⁶⁵ Lee, 160-162.

⁶⁶ William C. Sherman, Paul L. Whitney, and John Guerrero, *Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota* (Bismark: University of Mary Press, 2002), 78.

⁶⁷ “Peons are Cleared” *Bisbee Daily Review*, January 18, 1907.

⁶⁸ Braun Report, 27.

revealed a *padrone* system that entrapped Syrian immigrants as peddlers in Mexico, waylaying their journeys to the United States.

Seraphic stopped first at the principal Syrian headquarters in Veracruz, the dry goods store of Nicholas Homsey, where he found approximately eighty immigrants lodged. Homsey allegedly worked in collusion with steamship agents in Marseille and merchants in Mexico City, Monterrey, Juarez, and Torreon. Seraphic called Homsey “a grafter of the first degree.”⁶⁹ He owned a restaurant and a small boardinghouse of “a few filthy rooms” on a side street, and slapdash camps were erected in vacant lots for the overflow. Homsey charged immigrants \$1.00 to \$1.50 per night for paltry lodgings and \$2.00 for his services as a ticket agent and interpreter. Seraphic reported that Homsey and his contacts, “while in appearance and reputation a scheme for introducing Syrians into the United States across the Mexican border” was actually “a plan for opposing in every way such movement, the object of the merchants being to keep their countrymen in Mexico and exploit them in their own business, employing them as country peddlers.”⁷⁰ Under the direction of Homsey and others, immigrants were shuttled to the Yucatan, Mexico City, and elsewhere, to places where substantial profits could be made peddling goods. Steamship agents in Marseille were insinuated in the plot, steering healthy and diseased alike through Mexico. Seraphic encountered many Syrians who could readily pass inspection at Atlantic ports but who were channeled through Mexico. A *Brownsville Daily Herald* article reported that two Syrian women held at Eagle Pass had been “grossly deceived” by steamship agents at Marseille, who told them that Veracruz was a

⁶⁹ INS Records, “Mexican Immigration.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

stopping point on the way to Boston.⁷¹ After Homsey “divested [immigrants] of as much cash as possible,” he sent them on to Selim Almshiti, whom Seraphic regarded as “the chief immigrant robber in Mexico City.”⁷²

In Tampico, Mexico City, and Juarez, Seraphic found exploited Syrians lodged in squalid conditions. In Mexico City, the principal point of departure for cross-border migrants, restaurateurs, boardinghouse operators, and dry goods store owners abounded. Seraphic described the five boardinghouses that served Syrians as “filthy in the extreme;” where lodgers were “packed as sardines.” In Kalil Koury’s boarding house in Juarez, Syrians slept “hugged together... on muddy floors with no bedding or cover.”⁷³ Seraphic estimated that Koury made over \$700 in monthly profit on the boarding house, and he charged an additional \$3 for escorting migrants to and from train stations. As Ann Gabbert has shown, Koury was also involved in an extortion ring with two physicians in El Paso and Juarez. Koury took his Syrian charges for inspection by one doctor who rejected healthy and sick alike for trachoma, sending them to a second physician who “treated” them for \$20 apiece. Syrians pressed for funds awaited remittances from friends and family in the United States, or were forced into peddling by their dwindling finances.

Syrians who could afford to cross were smuggled from Porfirio Diaz, Monterrey, and Torreon. Selim Almshiti escorted groups of fifteen or so to the dry goods store of Isra Marcos at Porfirio Diaz, near Eagle Pass, Texas. Almshiti charged \$20 to \$30 for his

⁷¹ “Syrians Deported: Women Grossly Deceived by Unscrupulous Steamship Agents,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, April 18, 1904.

⁷² INS Records, “Mexican Immigration.”

⁷³ *Ibid*, 14.

services, which he confidently claimed ““guaranteed admittance into the United States.””⁷⁴ Seraphic found similar operations in Torreon and Monterrey, the latter serving as the location to which immigrants rejected at the border as paupers, contract laborers, diseased, or otherwise, regrouped to get medical treatment or further instructions “with the object of making further attempts to cross the border.”⁷⁵

Braun and Seraphic’s reports confirmed many Americans’ worst fears about conditions at the border and of Syrians blazing trails into the United States, recommending further restrictions to stop them. Braun evaluated the spectrum of immigrants arriving from across the Atlantic proclaiming northern European immigrants to be “the best we get,” and “those from eastern and southern Europe...very rarely desirable” even if they were not among the excluded classes. He saved a special disdain for Ottoman subjects—both “European and Asiatic”—whom he described as “nothing short of a menace to this country” and “positively...the worst kind of people in the world...either by nature or by centuries of oppression.”⁷⁶ Both men concluded that the fences were not enough. Braun recommended broadening exclusions to “all persons adjudged as ‘undesirable’” at all immigration stations in the U.S. Seraphic suggested photographing all debarred “Orientals” to prevent them from crossing, but he also recommended much broader exclusions: that the “wisest and most effective solution will

⁷⁴ INS Records, “Mexican Immigration.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Ann Gabbert described this extortion ring at El Paso.

⁷⁶ Braun Report, 27.

be to close the Mexican border to aliens” entirely.⁷⁷ Ultimately, they found the fences barring contract laborers, the poor, and the sick to be inadequate.

Although the press, policy makers, and immigration officials often attributed these excludable categories to racial characteristics, Braun and Seraphic’s investigations show that the afflictions that barred migrants from entry were often symptoms of conditions en route. Diseases like trachoma did not discriminate on the basis of race or nationality, spreading like wildfire in the port cities of Europe, in steerage, and in filthy cramped boardinghouses. According to Howard Markel, “[i]f one immigrant infected with trachoma was mistakenly allowed to travel in the crowded steerage section of a steamship, that person, without adequate sanitary measures, provided a real health risk to the other immigrants in the same compartment.”⁷⁸ Even Inspector Braun contracted trachoma aboard the *Prinz August Wilhelm*. He was mortified to report “that, I too, contracted [trachoma] by merely moving in and breathing the same atmosphere.”⁷⁹ And if the American press and policy makers offered racial arguments to explain peddling and *padronism*, it was not due to the migrants’ Maronite Christian faith, Arab ancestry, or inability to learn English, but to the exigencies of life in a strange new land. Peddling suppliers—so-called *padrones*—were often the means by which Syrian immigrants made the journey and started life in a foreign land with few contacts, little knowledge of the language, and even less capital. For those who arrived at American ports and borders

⁷⁷ Braun Report, 52; INS Records, “Mexican Immigration.”

⁷⁸ Howard Markel, “‘The Eyes Have It’: Trachoma, the Perception of Disease, the United States Health Service, and the American Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1897-1924,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 74 (2000): 533.

⁷⁹ Braun Report, 17.

looking destitute in filthy tattered rags, and appeared indisputably “likely to become public charges,” it is not surprising because so many were robbed blind at every turn.

Building Walls

In 1907, the same year Braun and Seraphic’s investigations ended, Congress authorized the Dillingham Commission. In 1911, the Commission published a forty-one volume report which was used as the basis for more comprehensive exclusions. The Dillingham Commission Report confirmed and codified preexisting prejudices against the “new” immigrants, citing their inferiority in education, ability, and genetic makeup to those who had come before them.⁸⁰ The Report recommended a new regime of immigration restrictions that would limit “each [race] arriving each year to a certain percentage of that race arriving during a given period of years.”⁸¹ The Report’s recommendations laid the foundations for the “Asiatic barred zone” in 1917 (which excluded Syria), and for restrictions based on national origin and race in 1921 and 1924, ending the era of piecemeal restriction.

While Syrians continued to straddle the racial divide between Southern Europeans and East Asians, they had moved closer to Whiteness by the nineteen-teens. In 1899, a House Committee on Immigration categorized Syrians as “Other Races” alongside Chinese, Cuban, and Japanese immigrants.⁸² The Dillingham Commission Report categorized Syrians among Southern and Eastern Europeans in the anomalous category

⁸⁰ Daniels, 45.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² U.S. House, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration*, 57th Congress, 1st sess., 1901, H. Doc. 104, 284.

“Other European, including Syrian” or as “Southern and eastern Europeans and Syrians;” but Syrians slipped into “Oriental” designations as well.⁸³ At the same time, between 1909 and 1914, Syrians successfully adjudicated their White racial status and eligibility for citizenship, arguing that they were “Caucasian.” In this way, Syrians distanced themselves from Asian identity and from those who faced wholesale exclusion and alien status.

By the nineteen-teens, the networks and *padronism* seemed to be in decline among Syrians. The Dillingham Commission Report reflected Braun and Seraphics’ findings, describing a *padrone* system among Syrians in which suppliers controlled peddlers who were lodged in unsanitary conditions. But in recent years, the Dillingham Report stated, “[t]his exploitation has...been abandoned, for peddling has ceased to be as profitable as it was in the past,” and more importantly, the “old peddlers have learned enough to refuse to submit to such control by others of their race.”⁸⁴ Although it existed in a few isolated cases, the Syrian *padrone* system appeared defunct. Around the same time, Syrian networks through Egypt and France fell into disuse, replaced by more expeditious travel arrangements that booked immigrants’ passage directly from Beirut to the Americas.⁸⁵

Although immigration restrictions created barriers and these networks disappeared, the trails remained etched in the dust. Distribution centers staked out by Syrian suppliers marked terminuses for many Syrian immigrants who took up peddling in their transition

⁸³ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 61st Congress, 3rd sess., (Washington D.C.: GPO), 1911, 608 and 425.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁸⁵ Naff, 89.

to life in America, and formed the nuclei of nascent Arab American communities across the country, including my own. In 1902, a Syrian supplier recruited peddlers from Mount Lebanon to his thriving wholesale business on the Kansas prairie. Three quarters of a century later, his distant descendants recruited my own father, and many more, from the American University in Beirut to the thriving Arab American community in Wichita, Kansas—this time, as physicians. If the circumstances had changed, the connections remained the same. Through time and space, networks such as these bridged oceans and built communities, helping the next generation of immigrants make new lives and livelihoods in unfamiliar lands.

CHAPTER FOUR: "WHITENESS AS PROPERTY": SYRIAN HOMESTEADERS
 IN NORTH DAKOTA

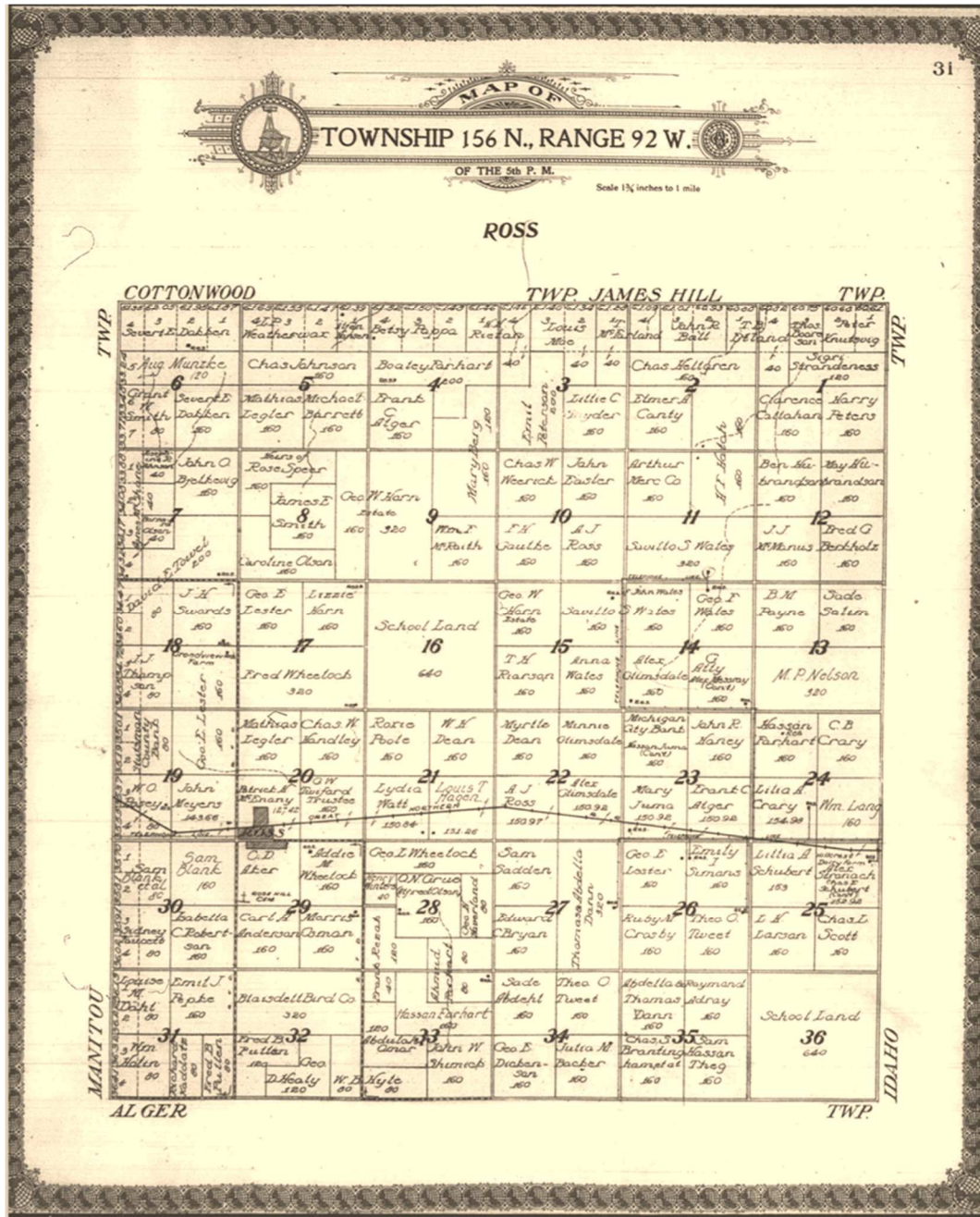


Figure 13 Plat Map of Ross Township, Standard Atlas of Mountrail County, North Dakota (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1917), State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck

In 1917, Geo. A. Ogle & Co. printed *The Standard Atlas of Mountrail County, North Dakota*, a plat book of the county's cities and townships. I viewed a copy of the frayed, yellowing volume at the Arab American National Museum, in an exhibit on Syrian homesteaders in North Dakota. For me, the plat book was the single most compelling artifact in the museum's collection. The atlas was propped open to plats of Ross and Manitou Townships, where Arab names—Juma, Farhart, Hassan, Salim, Omar, and others—mark many of the map's patchwork quarter-sections. Months later, driving west on Interstate 2 toward Stanley, Mountrail's county seat, the plat map came to mind, how it abstracted and signified the physical landscape that stretched toward the broad horizon. The plat maps are century-old representations of a landscape on the western slope of the Missouri Plateau, a hilly, rocky, mixed-grassland, punctuated by prairie potholes formed in the last glaciation. Over ten thousand years of water runoff from adjacent hills created dark silty surface soils which overlay hundreds of feet of sediment, and below that, rock. The potential to transform these dark soils into better lives drew Syrian immigrants and others to the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The era of early Syrian migration to the United States coincided with the transfer of so-called “free land” in North Dakota to “actual settlers of the public domain” through the 1862 Homestead Act and related land policies. The Homestead Act dramatically altered land ownership in the United States. Ten percent of all lands, or 270 million acres in thirty states, were settled under the Homestead Act.¹ The promise of “free land” and

¹ “National Significance of Homesteading,” Homestead National Historical Park, December 29, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/home/learn/historyculture/homesteading-significance.html>

opportunity dramatically increased immigration to the United States, contributing to the racial and ethnic diversity of the Great Plains.

This story of Syrian settlers highlights the central role access to citizenship played in the homesteading process, and connections among race, property, and citizenship rights. The Homestead Act is remembered by many as a uniquely democratic policy, as land was made available to adult citizens and immigrants, Black and White, male and female.² But only immigrants eligible for citizenship need apply. Before many western states enacted anti-Asian Alien Land Laws, U.S. naturalization laws barred Asian immigrants from claiming homesteads. In the era of Asian exclusion, “ineligible for citizenship” was a racial code for exclusion from homesteading rights.³ When between 1909 and 1915 Syrian immigrants’ eligibility for citizenship was challenged on the grounds that they were Asians, not “free white persons,” according to the 1790 Nationality Act, it also threatened their access to “free land.” For Syrian homesteaders, citizenship and the homestead entitlement hinged on securing a White racial status. In their case, “Whiteness as property” was quite literal. Examining how Syrians got their names on the map complicates the image of the White settler.

² Richard Edwards, Jacob K. Friefeld, Rebecca S. Wingo, *Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 1.

³ Rose Cuison Villazor, “Rediscovering *Oyama v. California*: At the Intersection of Property, Race, and Citizenship,” *Washington University Law Review* 87 [2010]: 979-1042. In her article, Villazor highlights connections among race, property, and citizenship rights as they related to California’s Alien Land Laws, which barred Japanese persons “ineligible for citizenship” from owning or leasing property. Inspired by Villazor’s insight, I show how the same language was used on the federal level to bar racial groups “ineligible for citizenship” from the homestead privilege, a discriminatory restriction whose meaning changed with the vicissitudes of U.S. nationality law.

Scholars of the Arab American experience have used the racial prerequisite cases to show how Syrians were racially ambiguous, positioned somewhere in between White and non-White. As these studies have shown, although Syrians were ultimately deemed Caucasian by law, they were racially in-between, and usually defined as non-White in the popular imagination.⁴ Rather than exploring the social contexts in which Syrians experienced life as non-Whites, this history highlights the privilege of legal Whiteness. And yet, if Whiteness afforded Syrians the homestead privilege, the land was hardly free.

⁴ On Arab Americans and race, see for example: Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds. *Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse University Press, 2008); Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab Americans and the Meaning of Race," in *Postcolonial Theory in the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 320-37; Helen Hatab Samhan, "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 209-226.



Figure 14 Mountain County Plat Map showing Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Standard Atlas of Mountrail County, North Dakota (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1917), State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck

A larger map would show Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in the southern quarter of Mountrail County, created in 1870 as the domain of the Three Affiliated Tribes: Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. Grappling with the concomitant realities of “free land” and Indigenous dispossession are central to understanding the history of homesteading in the United States and in other settler states that enacted similar policies.⁵ Homesteading epitomizes important myths and realities about American colonialism—homesteaders symbolize the original American Dream, but they have also come to signify the nightmare of Indigenous dispossession. Although homesteaders are perhaps no more culpable than other American settlers past and present, they have become symbolic settlers in the public imagination. The Homestead National Monument, whose roofline is designed in the curvilinear form of a single bottom plow, highlights this complicated legacy in its central exhibit. At the monument’s heritage center, large signs reading “OPPORTUNITY” and “DISPLACEMENT” flank a reproduction of John Gast’s 1872 painting *American Progress*, an allegory of Manifest Destiny which depicts Indians and bison herds fleeing as a parade of miners, farmers, and railroads carry “progress” and “enlightenment” on their westward trek.

American Progress is perhaps the quintessential representation of the ideology underpinning the conquest of lands west of the Mississippi, but colonialism is far more than an assemblage of ideas and representations. Patrick Wolfe has called settler

⁵ See, for example: Mikal Brotnov Eckstrom, “Probationary Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in the American West: American Jews and American Indians, 1850-1934” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2018); Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of the Dakota Indians, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alaina E. Roberts, *I’ve Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

colonization a “structure not an event,”⁶ and that structure was built not simply on the imagined binary of savagery and civilization, nor on the violent intrusions we imagine as conquest; colonization entailed a far more mundane set of bureaucratic practices. Cole Harris writes: “The experienced materiality of colonialism is grounded... in dispossessions and repossessions of land...[which] rested with a set of disciplinary technologies of which maps, numbers, and law were perhaps the most important.”⁷ The plat maps and the land policies that created them exemplify legal and bureaucratic dimensions of U.S. colonialism. Syrian immigrants were agents in this complex process.

Further, as immigrants fresh off the boat, the bureaucratic intricacies entailed in the law presented a challenge for Syrians intent on taking land. Getting your name on the map was no easy task, yet the Homestead Act required only a few seemingly simple steps to take possession: filing an affidavit that you were entitled to the homestead privilege, presenting a homestead application, establishing residency, and improving the property in three to five years’ time. Syrians’ land entry case files illustrate this process, and how the language barrier was a significant, but hardly insurmountable, obstacle in filing a homestead claim.

Ultimately, the promise of opportunity enshrined in the Homestead Act was just that—an opportunity. Access to free or cheap land hardly guaranteed success, upward mobility, or even long-term settlement. For this reason and others, many historians have

⁶ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006): 388.

⁷ Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess: Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (February 2008): 166-167, 179.

viewed the policy as a failure.⁸ Many homesteaders lived in poverty, failed, or gave up and moved on. The fortunate proved up and used their land as capital to fund opportunities elsewhere, and a few names have remained on the maps for generations.

Opportunity

On October 2, 1902, during the second Dakota land boom, four Syrian peddlers appeared at a U.S. Land Office to file on a homestead. One of the peddlers rushed over to the plat map, pointed at a section, and inquired whether it was taken.⁹ When the County Attorney told the men to come back in an hour, the peddlers gave him a twenty-five cents to “[h]old him for us to file on until you get back.” According to the *Jamestown Alert*, this was merely one “sample of the anxiety the newcomers have to file on the land after getting a look at it,” and that “[o]n every train west and north are people who wish to take homesteads.”¹⁰ The extension of the Northern Pacific Railroad through the region in 1871 set the stage for the settlement of western North Dakota by providing transportation routes into the area, as well as shipping for agricultural products to market. A rise in the price of farmland and farm produce in the late 1890s also propelled settlers into the area during this period.¹¹ Although a handful of Syrians immigrated to North Dakota in the 1880s, most homesteaded between the mid-1890s and 1910s.¹² 1902, the year the peddlers

⁸ Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 5.

⁹ “Going Rapidly,” *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, October 2, 1902.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

¹² North Dakota State University, “North Dakota Naturalization Records Index,” <https://library.ndsu.edu/db/naturalization/>, [accessed March 1, 2018].

filed, was the height of the land rush, and probably the year in which the greatest number of Syrians filed on land in the state.¹³

For nearly a century before the Syrian peddlers staked their claim, the U.S. government took steps that opened the promise of homesteading to American and immigrant settlers. Thomas Jefferson acquired much of what is now North Dakota for the United States with the Louisiana Purchase. The Homestead Act, signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, declared any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, *or who shall have filed his declaration of intention to become such...*[was] entitled to enter one quarter section or a less quantity of unappropriated public lands...for the purpose of actual settlement and cultivation [emphasis added].¹⁴

Homesteading occurred in two phases defined by time and place. The first wave of homesteaders took land in Kansas, Nebraska, Oregon, and California from the late 1860s to the mid-1890s, and the second phase, from the late 1890s to the 1920s, occurred in the Dakotas, Oklahoma, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado.¹⁵ This was the era of the second Dakota land boom, when a quarter-million settlers flooded into the state, especially the Missouri Plateau, to take some of the last available homestead land.¹⁶ Syrians were primarily part of the second phase of homesteading.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Homestead Act of 1862*, 37th Cong., Public Law 37-64, 2d sess., (May 20, 1862).

¹⁵ Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 12.

¹⁶ Robinson, 236.

Adding fuel to the fire, North Dakota state and local governments and the railroads launched aggressive campaigns to draw immigrant settlers to the state. The state immigration office lauded the region, proclaiming somewhat speciously, that its “winters were not too severe, the climate was healthful, the rainfall adequate, the soil fertile, and free land still available.”¹⁷ The Northern Pacific advertised in newspapers and translated their message into many languages, distributing 632,590 pamphlets from its Liverpool office alone—a city that was a common way station for immigrants. It also placed nearly one thousand agents in Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, and Germany. The railroads also sponsored colonization societies that brought groups of fifty to one hundred immigrant families to the state. Among these were Scandinavian, Jewish, German, Russian, and Dutch immigrant settlers. Like so many other immigrant groups, Syrians migrated to the United States and to North Dakota in search of economic opportunities unavailable in their homeland.

Unlike western North Dakota during the same period, the region of Greater Syria that is now Lebanon experienced land shortages that encouraged out-migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the mid-nineteenth century, agriculture in Mount Lebanon began an uneven transformation from subsistence farming to a monoculture cash-crop economy based on silk production for the looms of Lyons, France. With this transformation, silk production dominated the landscape, occupying forty-five percent of Mount Lebanon’s cultivable area.¹⁸ A majority of the population

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

¹⁸ Fawwaz Traboulsi, “Grandeur and Misery of the Mutasarrifiya (1861-1915),” in *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2012): 46.

were small landowning farmers, and the rising demand for land on which to plant mulberry trees put pressure on small cultivators of olives, grapes, and other crops.¹⁹ In addition, the Greek Orthodox Church controlled one-third of all land in Mount Lebanon. At the same time, relative prosperity produced a population boom. According to Fawwaz Traboulsi, “the limited growth of cultivable land in relation to the rapid population growth was instrumental as a ‘push factor’ for emigration.”²⁰ Some Syrian immigrant homesteaders noted the paucity of farmland in their homeland as an impetus for migration. Mary Juma recalled that her husband's forty-acre farm “wasn’t enough for us to but barely exist on.”²¹ Like Juma, Mike Abdallah said that he eventually took a homestead in Mountrail County because, “[i]n the old country I only had forty acres to farm...so it was very hard to make a living.”²²

While the problem of an increasing population and limited land did encourage Syrian migration to the United States and elsewhere, on the whole, migration was not undertaken under duress but for economic opportunity. For many Syrians, relative prosperity in the homeland resulted in rising material expectations.²³ These individuals and families, for the most part, intended to make money in the United States and return home to Syria. In the words of Alixa Naff,

¹⁹ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1993), 38.

²⁰ Traboulsi, 47.

²¹ Interview with Mary Juma, “North Dakota Writers’ Project, Ethnic Group Files, 1935-1942,” Record Series 30559, Box 86, Folder 31, State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND).

²² North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Mike Juma, SHSND.

²³ Naff, 40.

[t]heirs was not an emergency or panic flight, it was a deliberate and calculated choice made by individual families. Informed in advance, usually by relatives and friends in America, they almost always knew their destination...and believed they knew how they would prosper.²⁴

Syrians learned of opportunities for homesteads in central and western North Dakota through the grapevine of ethnic and family information networks that stretched from the Old Country to the United States. John C. Hudson has written of the impressive reach of ethnic networks, writing that

what is most striking is not the lack of information possessed by pioneers wandering into the unknown grasslands, but rather the apparently well-used information networks specific to ethnic groups which formed a bond between the widely scattered enclaves, and the usefulness of these informal networks in spreading information about economic opportunities when and where they arose.²⁵

Syrian immigrant Joseph Abraham heard about “free land” in North Dakota while he was working on his brother’s homestead in Minnesota. He recalled that in 1902, “[s]omebody told me everybody’s come to North Dakota get land, and I come like others.”²⁶ In 1903, David Kalil also “heard of homesteads in North Dakota and there was some Syrians had homesteaded here before, so I left Duluth and filed on land in 1903.”²⁷ In 1902, Syrian

²⁴ Ibid., 83.

²⁵ John C. Hudson, “Migration to an American Frontier,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (1976): 244.

²⁶ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Joseph Abraham, SHSND.

²⁷ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with David Kalil, SHSND.

immigrant Attas Boutrous was living in Sioux City, Iowa, and working for Armour Meatpacking when he heard that homesteads were available in North Dakota; he relocated to Washburn “to take advantage of this opportunity.”²⁸ Many reunited with family members who had immigrated to North Dakota earlier. Joe Munyer had two uncles farming in Rugby, who “told [him] how much money could be made in this country farming.”²⁹ The “peddler’s grapevine,” as William Sherman, Paul L. Whitney, and John Guerrero termed it, served as an important communication network among Syrian immigrants, as peddlers “could see at close hand an immense part of America’s rural regions: new land, good land, and often ideal farmland.”³⁰ Mary Juma and her husband arrived in Canada in 1900, took up peddling in Nebraska in 1901, and moved into western North Dakota to peddle when “there was such an influx of people to take homesteads, and for no reason at all, we decided to try homesteading too.”³¹

As Mary Juma’s story indicates, single men were not the only Syrian immigrants drawn to the northern Plains—Syrian women traveled alone and with their families on the long journey to North Dakota. According to Sarah Gualtieri, between 1899 and 1914 women made up thirty-two percent of immigrants from Greater Syria; only twenty-one percent of Southern Italian immigrants were women, by contrast.³² In 1911, Louise

²⁸ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Attas Boutrous, SHSND.

²⁹ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Joe Munyer, SHSND.

³⁰ William C. Sherman, Paul L. Whitney, John Guerrero, *Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota* (Bismarck: University of Mary Press, 2002), 123.

³¹ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Mary Juma, SHSND.

³² Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, “Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis: Woman and Syrian Transatlantic Migration,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004): 68.

Houghton remarked on the prevalence of young women among Syrian immigrants: “it is not infrequently the case that the eldest daughter will precede her parents, or a sister her brother, to this country, and earn the money needed to bring over the father and brother.”³³ Barbara Wizer traveled alone to the United States from her native Zahle, following her mother, Selma Kirk, who had immigrated earlier and had filed on land in Reno Valley township, in Pierce County, North Dakota.³⁴ Like Mary Juma, Mary Ferris came to the United States with her husband, leaving her son and three-month-old daughter behind in the Old Country.³⁵ Her daughter finally joined her at the age of twelve. Ferris remembered that many parents left their children behind, planning to earn some money and return home.

Like so many who migrated to the Americas before them, tales of easy wealth enticed Syrian immigrants to settle on the North Dakota prairies. Thomas Nassif immigrated to Kief, North Dakota after hearing tales of easy money in the United States: “From what I had been told and from what I had heard about this country I thought that they were just shoveling money into their pockets and they didn’t have to work at all. I thought everyone had a gold mine here.”³⁶ Stories of wealth and opportunity also encouraged Boaley Farhart to migrate to the Americas. “I had thoughts of becoming rich and returning to Syria to live in luxury for the rest of my life, and I expected to find

³³ *Ibid.*, 69, Gualtieri quoting Louise Houghton, “Syrians in the United States,” *The Survey*, 26:19 (1911): 660.

³⁴ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Barbara Wizer, SHSND.

³⁵ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Mary Ferris, SHSND.

³⁶ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Thomas Nassif, SHSND.

opportunities, good wages, and much of everything wherever one turned.”³⁷ He soon found a sobering reality. Farhart left Syria in 1904 for South America and “went broke” two years later. In 1906, his brother sent him seventy dollars for passage to Ross, North Dakota, where Farhart “immediately filed on a homestead.”³⁸ Primed by letters of opportunities to be found in America, Mike Abdullah expected to find “lots of work for which [you] got big pay, free land to farm and live on, and much freedom.”³⁹ For some Syrian immigrants, seeing the land was enough to dispel the fantasy that homesteading promised easy wealth. Two land locators from the Minot Land Office took Mary Juma and her husband to see homesteads available in Mountrail County. The land locators walked the couple down the railroad tracks a few miles west of Ross.⁴⁰ Upon examining the area, Juma summed up what was probably the sentiment of many prospective homesteaders: “I thought it would be easy to make money, but when I saw the land, I changed my mind.”⁴¹ In spite of their reservations, the Jumas filed on forty acres.

Dispossession

While the idea of “free land” promised opportunity to immigrant homesteaders, it was quite the opposite for Indigenous peoples. The region of western North Dakota represented in the plat map was the ancestral home of the Mandan and Hidatsa peoples.

³⁷ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Boaley Farhart, SHSND.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Mike Abdella, SHSND.

⁴⁰ Charlie Juma Sr., interview by Larry Strunk, Stanley, North Dakota, 1974, interview MN-24, 669 A&B, North Dakota Oral History Collection 10157, State Historical Society of North Dakota.

⁴¹ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Hassyn Alla Juma, SHSND.

Historians place the Mandan in the Upper Missouri River Valley beginning about a millennium ago, and the Hidatsa from the very early seventeenth century, but both groups believe that they were created in and have always inhabited the region.⁴² The Mandan and Hidatsa peoples subsisted on a combination of horticulture and hunting; they grew corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers on the flood plain of the Upper Missouri and hunted bison outside of the river valley.⁴³ Their traditional method of farming, which employed subirrigation from the river, rendered these Indigenous horticulturalists far less dependent on rainfall than homesteaders who later tried to cultivate the soil outside the valley.⁴⁴ The Mandan villages served as the “marketplace of the central plains,” where many traveled for agricultural products and manufactures. Their economies supported affluent societies with large populations and a rich ceremonial life.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Euro-American diseases devastated the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara demographically. In the mid-eighteenth century, population estimates for the Mandan and Hidatsa ranged from 27,000 to 36,000.⁴⁵ The first smallpox epidemic that swept through the northern plains hit the Three Affiliated Tribes in the early 1780s. When the English cartographer David Thompson visited the area from 1797 to 1789, he estimated that there remained only 1330 Hidatsas, 1520

⁴² “MHA Nation History,” MHA Nation, <https://www.mhanation.com/history>, [accessed January 2018].

⁴³ Roy Willard Meyer, *The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 2-3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

Mandans, and 2000 Arikara survivors.⁴⁶ In 1837, smallpox returned to the Upper Missouri on an American Fur Company steamboat. This wave of the epidemic nearly wiped out the Mandan, reducing their people to fewer than 150 souls.⁴⁷ They also suffered significant losses from unremitting warfare with the Sioux in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Between 1845 and 1862, the surviving Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara joined together, reorganizing and revitalizing their societies by founding Like-a-Fishhook Village, an earth-lodge village that came to be synonymous with Fort Berthold, located just above the settlement.⁴⁸ As Angela K. Parker has pointed out, although striking, population demographics hardly convey the devastation wrought by disease on the Three Affiliated Tribes. Emmarine Chase (Mandan, Hidatsa) related the scene as her grandmother remembered it: After smallpox they moved up to Fishhook Village... she said they just left everything. All our winter food, she said, we didn't even take time to try to carry anything cause we all traveled on foot and there was very few that had dogs, you know. Even dogs were just dying off. It was really pitiful, she said. There was women that had their little babies in bundles that got that smallpox, and she said they were crying, and they took those babies and tied them up as high as they could on trees, strapped them so that no animal would eat them. And the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

babies were just crying, but they, the whole village was just, nothing but *wailing*, you could *hear* it, it was *terrible*.⁴⁹

And the loss of life was accompanied by the loss of land. In 1851, the U.S. government first recognized the Three Affiliated Tribes' ancestral land base with the Treaty of Fort Laramie, but systematically chipped away at it in the decades following. The United States treaty commissioners convened representatives of the Cheyenne, Sioux, Arapaho, Crow, Assiniboine, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations at Fort Laramie to establish land boundaries among the groups. The purpose of the 1851 treaty council was ostensibly to lessen conflict among the tribes of the northern plains, and to protect American settlers traversing the Oregon Trail. Some have suggested, however, that the U.S. government initiated this process to make it easier for individual tribes to sell their lands without the potential problem of conflicting claims.⁵⁰ This was a critical step in the commodification and conquest of the northern plains. The treaty boundaries recognized a swath of territory belonging to the Three Affiliated Tribes that stretched from the Missouri River to the headwaters of the Yellowstone. Four representatives of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara—Bear Chief, Four Bears, Grey Prairie Eagle, and Red Roan Cow—affixed Xs to the agreement.

The treaty achieved neither peace nor stability for the Three Affiliated Tribes. Warfare with the Sioux continued and the treaty boundaries did not hold. When President Ulysses S. Grant established Fort Berthold Reservation by executive order in 1870, its

⁴⁹ Angela K. Parker, "Taken Lands: Territory and Sovereignty on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011, 63.

⁵⁰ Meyer, 103.

boundaries did not reflect the territorial claims set forth in 1851. Dispossession after 1880 proceeded in two stages: first, the government reduced existing reservations, and after allotment, it opened “surplus land” within reservation boundaries; homesteading advocates agitated for both measures.⁵¹ In 1880, President Rutherford B. Hayes radically reduced the Fort Berthold Reservation from 7.8 million to 1.2 million acres. By 1891, the U.S. government had stripped the Three Affiliated Tribes of most of the territorial claims outlined at Fort Laramie—from 12,618,301 acres in 1851 to 965,620 acres in 1891—a loss of approximately 77 percent of their land in the span of only 40 years, and this included lands east of White Earth River that are now Mountrail County. Further exacerbating the situation, outbreaks of smallpox and cholera continued, and the concomitant disruption of the economy led to famine. A census in 1874 counted 618 Arikara, 403 Hidatsa, and 132 Mandan on Fort Berthold Reservation.⁵² By 1889, as a result of immigration and emigration, North Dakota reached the population threshold required for statehood.

Making Maps

The rapid dispossession and settlement of the northern Plains, and the West more generally, was accelerated by the unseen power of surveying—creating plat maps. Measuring and dividing land into discrete commodities made it possible for Americans, and immigrants, to own it.⁵³ Thomas Jefferson laid the foundations for the cadastral grid

⁵¹ Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 112.

⁵² Meyer, 132.

⁵³ Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How the United States was Shaped by the Greatest Land Sale in History* (New York: Plume, 2002), 4.

system that covered lands west of the Alleghenies. The spectacle and scale of this system is perhaps best appreciated from 30,000 feet, flying over the Great Plains where a seemingly endless patchwork grid dominates the view. Between 1783 and 1784, Jefferson developed three measures central to national development and colonization—the dollar, the procedure for admitting Western territories to the United States, and the means for surveying that territory.⁵⁴ Jefferson based this system on Edmund Gunter’s survey chain, a measuring instrument 66 feet long and subdivided into four poles and 100 links. Using this instrument, six mile square townships were drawn. According to Andro Linklater, “the advantage of a square measuring 6 traditional miles by 6 was its ease of subdivision for someone using Gunter’s chain. Each side measured 480 chains, a number that could be easily halved quartered, and so on, according to demand.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Linklater, 60.

⁵⁵ Linklater, 72.



Figure 15 Seal of the United States General Land Office, 1861. This engraving appeared on patent documents for land entries under the Homestead Act of 1862. Kenneth Hawkins, “Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office,” Reference Information paper 114, National Archives and Records Administration, 2009.

The link between Native dispossession and the land survey is epitomized in the 1861 seal of the U.S. General Land Office. The emblem depicts a land surveyor and an American Indian before a landscape of empty rolling hills. The surveyor is standing, notes in hand, surrounded by his equipment—a solar compass, tripod, and surveyor’s

chain—while the Indian man kneels, holding a peace pipe. The juxtaposition of the tipi and a surveyor’s mound marking the corner of a quarter-section suggested that a new way of life was coming to the West—from the “transience” of Native life implied by the tipi to the “settled” society of the Americans. Like tales of easy wealth and free land, this image was more myth than reality, the settlers were actually the nomads. By 1874, \$100,000 had been spent on surveying land in what was to become North Dakota and a U.S. Land Office was opened in Bismarck.⁵⁶

Getting Your Name On The Map

Getting your name on a plat map was no easy task, yet the law required only a few seemingly simple steps to take possession: filing an affidavit that you are entitled to the privilege of the law, presenting a homestead application, establishing residency, and improving the property in no less than five (later reduced to three) and no more than seven years’ time. Syrians’ land entry case files and oral histories illustrate the process of taking land, and some of the physical, psychological, economic, and bureaucratic challenges Syrian immigrants faced in proving up on their claims. As the case files illustrate, the language barrier was a significant, but not insurmountable, obstacle in filing a homestead claim, as the law and the bureaucrats who administered it aimed to facilitate the settlement of the land. Ultimately, Syrians greatest legal hurdle was proving their Whiteness and eligibility for citizenship, which entitled them to the privilege offered by the Homestead Act.

⁵⁶ Robinson, 132.

First Papers

For immigrants, establishing eligibility began with initiating the naturalization process. On December 17, 1906, twenty-five-year-old Sam Omar appeared before the clerk of the District Court of Ward County, North Dakota (now Mountrail County), to file his intention to become a U.S. citizen. His declaration of intention, or “first papers,” stated that he had immigrated through the port of New York in 1902, but he could not recall the name of the vessel. The form included Omar’s physical and racial description, which differentiated between “color” and “complexion:” “Color: *White*, complexion: *Dark*, height 5 feet 7 inches, weight 160 pounds, color of hair *Black*, color of eyes *Brown*.” It listed his occupation as a farmer; Omar had worked on his father’s farm in the Old Country, and had farmed rented land for a few years before immigrating to the United States. Most importantly, the declaration stated his intention to “renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, sovereignty, and particularly to Abdul Hamid II Sultan of Turkey, of which I am now a subject.” The form further maintained that Omar was neither “an anarchist...polygamist nor a believer in polygamy;” but most importantly, it stated Omar’s “intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States and to *permanently reside therein*.” [emphasis added]⁵⁷

But these were not Omar’s first first papers; this was his second attempt at filing his intention to naturalize. He had originally filed his first papers and homestead entry application three years earlier under the name Hesien or Hessen Aomar.⁵⁸ This caused

⁵⁷ NDSU Naturalization Index.

⁵⁸ “Letter from Sam Omar to U.S. Land Office at Minot, North Dakota,” March 8, 1905, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

problems later in the process. Many immigrants changed or Anglicized their names upon arrival, and others, misunderstood by immigration officials, were assigned names incorrectly. Syrians' first names often became their last names, as in the case of Boutrous Attiyeh, who became Attas Boutrous. Immigration officials in New York often Anglicized immigrants' names—one immigration official renamed Shahadeh Yusuf Jaibot "Charlie Joseph," a name he used for the rest of his life.⁵⁹ Allay Omar, Sam Omar's brother, was actually Allie (Ali) Sadden, but when he entered the United States he was unable to spell his name, he explained, "someone took the liberty of writing it for me and misspelled my surname, and my father's surname was given as my given name."⁶⁰ On March 8, 1905, Sam Omar explained that he was, in fact, the identical person who had filed the original claim under the name Hesien Omar, and the "discrepancy was due to the fact that at the time the filing was made, I was unable to write English or to speak said language plainly, and could not make myself understood." Omar signed the document with an "X."

In 1906, the year Omar filed his intention to naturalize, Congress passed the Basic Naturalization Act in an effort to create uniformity in the naturalization process, and to restrict naturalization to immigrants with proficiency in English. In the nineteenth century, the administration of citizenship varied by state, and judges who carried out the process had great latitude in naturalizing applicants.⁶¹ The 1802 Naturalization Act had

⁵⁹ Sherman, Whitney, and Guerrero, 389-391.

⁶⁰ North Dakota Writer's Project interview with Allay Omar, SHSND.

⁶¹ Irene Bloemraad, "Citizenship Lessons from the Past," *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (December 2006): 927-953.

authorized *any court of record*—federal, state, county, or municipal court—to naturalize immigrants. An investigation in 1905 found little uniformity among over 5,000 naturalization courts; each determined its own procedure, fees, and issued its own certificate of naturalization. More importantly, judges interpreted naturalization laws with little federal guidance. The Basic Naturalization Act created the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and within that entity, the Naturalization Division was to oversee and guide the courts. The new agency assumed responsibility for “all matters concerning the naturalization of aliens.”⁶² The standard form Omar submitted, which included his physical description, country of origin, port of entry, renunciation of former nationality, and his intention to become a U.S. citizen, was standardized by the law. The Naturalization Division furnished these blanks to federal and district courts charged with administering naturalization proceedings.

Section eight of the Basic Naturalization Act also created a literacy requirement, long the goal of restrictionist groups, which declared that “no alien shall hereafter be naturalized or admitted as a citizen of the United States who cannot speak the English language.”⁶³ Proponents of the literacy test linked illiteracy in English to other undesirable traits. The literacy requirement of the Basic Naturalization Act did, however, make an exception for *immigrant homesteaders*: “That the requirements of section eight shall not apply to aliens who shall hereafter declare their intention to become citizens and who

⁶² *Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1906*, Public Law 59-338, 59th Cong., 1st sess. (29 June 1906).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

shall make homestead entries upon the public lands of the United States.”⁶⁴ As we will see, without this exception to the literacy requirement, few Syrians—few immigrants—would have been eligible to file on land after the law passed.

Initially, entering and proving up on land only required the immigrant settler to file their intention to naturalize, and most Syrian homesteaders did not finalize the process until much later—Omar became a U.S. citizen in 1921. He filed his first first papers on the same day he filed on his homestead. Attas Boutrous filed his first papers ten days before filing on his homestead in McLean County. The land entry case files attest to the fact that during the homesteading years, many Syrians in North Dakota filed their intention to naturalize for the express purpose of claiming homesteads. That so many Syrians filed their first papers directly prior to claiming the homestead privilege also provides a rough estimate of the number of Syrians who filed on land in the state. Between 1894 and 1933, 497 Syrians filed their first papers in North Dakota; 324 of these filed between 1894 and 1910, during the second Dakota land boom.⁶⁵ Just as the Homestead Act aimed to establish long-term settlement on the land, naturalization requirements discouraged so-called “birds of flight,” immigrants who hoped to make money in the United States and return to their homelands.

Homestead Application

After confirming eligibility under the act, homesteaders presented an application, or Homestead Entry, at the land office in the district in which the desired lot was located, and paid a filing fee. The application, according to one homesteader’s guide, should be

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ NDSU Naturalization Database.

“properly prepared on blank forms prescribed for that purpose and sworn to before either the register or receiver, or before a United States commissioner, or a United States court commissioner, or a judge, or a clerk of a court of record, in the county... in which the land lies.”⁶⁶ On July 15, 1904, Attas Boutrous filed homestead application number 28655, at the Bismarck, North Dakota, Land Office for 150.92 acres which embraced Lots 3 and 4 of Section 7, Township 148 N. Range 48 W. 5th Prime Meridian, and S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ and N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 12 in Township 148 N. Range 77 W. 5th Prime Meridian. In signing the document before the county register, Boutrous certified that he was legally entitled to enter and that the homestead was surveyed, non-saline, and non-mineral land. Boutrous then paid a \$13.77 filing fee to make his entry. His affidavit was signed by William L. Nuessle, the U.S. Commissioner of the Division of North Dakota.

Nearly two years later, on March 12, 1906, Nuessle wrote a letter to the Land Office in Bismarck on Boutrous’ behalf. As it turned out, part of the land Boutrous had been living on and improving was not land he had actually filed on. He had established residence on what he thought was part of his claim; he had broken twelve acres and harvested one crop there. As the letter stated, Boutrous never intended to file on land in Lot 3, which was “very poor and unfit for anything but pasture”; he intended to file on the S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 12, which was a “much better forty.” The letter requested an amendment to Boutrous’ claim, as it “will work great hardship on upon me in case I be not permitted to amend.” Boutrous was fortunate to have had the help of Commissioner Nuessle, who was then the States Attorney for McLean County. Nuessle traveled from

⁶⁶ *1862 Homestead Act.*

Washburn to Denhoff, today an hour's drive by car, to help Boutrous and his relatives navigate the bureaucratic pitfalls of the homesteading process.⁶⁷

Failing to understand the intricacies of the law could also put a homestead claim in jeopardy. Ahmed Farhart filed his homestead application for eighty acres at the Minot Land Office on August 13, 1903. Acting under the advice of a fellow Syrian, Abbe Morfa, Farhart relinquished his claim soon after entering it. Morfa had advised him that relinquishing the eighty acres would enable him to take a full 160-acre quarter section, but this was not the case. On December 2, 1903, Farhart and two witnesses, Morfa and Abdullah Farhart, signed their names, in Arabic, to the relinquishment papers. Morfa then filed on the claim Farhart had relinquished. Upon filing another homestead claim, Farhart found that he was not entitled to do so. Farhart's letter to Minot Land Office requested that the claim be restored to him, for the reason that the "Affiant cannot read or write the English language and is not familiar with the laws of the U.S."⁶⁸ Fortunately for Farhart, the GLO granted local agents considerable flexibility in dealing with the scores of illiterate and non-English speaking claimants who often lacked experience dealing with officials and had even less exposure to the subtleties of the law.⁶⁹ The GLO expected officials to respond to local and individual circumstances to achieve the intent of the

⁶⁷ "1950 Attiyeh Convention Program," private collection of Michael Boutrous, Bismarck, North Dakota.

⁶⁸ "Letter from Ahmed Farhart to United States Land Office at Minot, North Dakota," June 11, 1904, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹ Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 44.

law—establishing settlers on the public domain.⁷⁰ On June 17, 1904, Farhart’s claim was reinstated, Morfa’s application dismissed, and the case closed.

The homestead application could provoke confusion even for those who *could* read the blank. The *Bismarck Tribune* reported, that on September 11, 1907, a “very bright looking” Syrian came to the Bismarck Land Office to file his homestead entry. After filling out his application, the young man paused at the bottom where the form read “Sign full Christian name here.” The prospective homesteader “turned to the clerk in amazement and said: ‘What will I sign in this place; I am a Mohammedan and have no Christian name?’”⁷¹

Residency

After filing the affidavit and application, the U.S. government required homesteaders to establish residency, break and plant a portion of the land, and live on the claim continuously. Homesteaders had to establish residency within six months of filing their entry; this meant building and living in a structure on the claim. Residence was a critical component of the Homestead Act. In the language of the law, its benefits were restricted to “actual settlers,” and its advocates aimed to prevent speculation and to guarantee individuals and families access to property. Like the homestead affidavit, residency requirements were a way to restrict access to land to “bona fide settlers only.”⁷² The law stipulated that no single absence from the claim be longer than six months. The *Fargo Record* warned, “don’t take a homestead claim expecting you can hold it and prove up on

⁷⁰ Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 43.

⁷¹ “Was a Mohammedan,” *Bismarck Tribune*, September 11, 1907.

⁷² Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, 51.

it without residence. Residence is the very essence of the law.”⁷³

Establishing residency meant building a home. Carl Nassif, who homesteaded near Denhoff, North Dakota, built a timber shed for his horses and sod shack for himself, outfitting it with a Morley stove and some boxes for furniture.⁷⁴ Although sod houses, or “soddies,” are typically associated with homesteading on the Great Plains, during the early twentieth century in central and western North Dakota, most homesteaders opted for timber shacks covered in tar-paper, which were the easiest and most economical means of fulfilling the government’s demand that settlers build homes at least ten-by-twelve feet in size. Allay Omar’s one-room twelve-by-fourteen-foot frame shack in Mountrail County was large enough to satisfy the law. Joseph Abraham built a very small eight-by-eight shack at first, and built bigger ones every once in a while.⁷⁵ Unlike soddies, which provided a modicum of protection against both the summer heat and subzero winters, tar-paper shacks provided little defense against extreme weather. Homestead shacks not firmly anchored to the soil often blew away or collapsed in strong prairie winds.

Harsh North Dakota winters made homesteaders vulnerable in these precarious and transient dwellings. Albert Berry, a Syrian homesteader living on his claim about thirteen miles from Willison was found frozen in his shack in January 1907. The press reported that Berry was found “in bed with plenty of clothing on besides a sheep lined overcoat

⁷³ S.B. Salvorson quoting the *Fargo Record* in “Hard Wheat,” 1935-1942, Series 30558, North Dakota Writers’ Project, State Historical Society of North Dakota.

⁷⁴ Carl and Wardi Nassif, interview by Alixa Naff, 1962, Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁵ North Dakota Writer’s Project interview with Joseph Abraham, SHSND.

and cap, which was pulled down over his ears.” There was food and fuel in the shack, but the report claimed it was illness rather than the cold that took the homesteader’s life.⁷⁶ The paper argued it was not weather, but a lack of preparedness, that sealed Berry’s fate, although curiously, the scene suggests he had been equipped for the storm. It seems more likely that Berry froze to death, but reports of residents freezing to death might have deterred prospective homesteaders from settling in the area.

Carl Nassif recalled the bitter winter of 1906 in North Dakota, when he and his family were caught unprepared for inclement weather. Nassif and his family farmed on neighboring homesteads near McClusky, North Dakota. When the family ran out of coal, Nassif and his cousin volunteered to make the trek to a nearby mine. When they descended into the pit to dig their coal, Nassif’s clothing was frozen, and so was the sandwich he brought along with him. Freezing and hungry, they stopped at a Russian neighbor’s farm; she fed them some roast and they continued on their way. But soon, Nassif’s sleigh got stuck deep in the snow. By the time they returned to his sod shack, Nassif’s fingers and toes were frozen. It took him three months to recover from the frostbite, and the young homesteader lost his toes. In the spring he said, “no more of this for me.” He took his team of horses and moved on.

Improving The Land

Breaking and planting the land was another requirement of the law, and cooperation was an important strategy for getting the job done. To comply with the law, the GLO stipulated that homesteaders cultivate their claim. By the second year of residence, homesteaders had to show that no less than one-eighth of the entire area of

⁷⁶ “Can Expect Tales of Woe,” *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, January 31, 1907.

land entered was cultivated, or twenty acres on a one-hundred-sixty-acre farm. By the third year, homesteaders needed to cultivate one-fourth of the property, or forty acres on a one-hundred-sixty-acre farm. And, in the fourth and fifth years of residency, no less than one-half of the claim had to be cultivated. The Juma family, who homesteaded in Mountrail County in 1902, teamed up with two Syrian brothers to prove up their claim. To break the soil, two would dig rocks, while the other two hauled them. Mary Juma worked alongside the men in this arduous process. The Jumas and the brothers shared equipment and horses, and they even purchased a binder together, a machine used for cutting and bundling wheat. These kinds of strategies enabled Syrians to meet the requirements of the law.

Oftentimes, poverty and/or the capital investment required to improve a homestead necessitated working off of ones' claim. In fact, most homesteaders continued to engage in wage labor or peddling even after they had established residency on the land. The land entry case files and interviews with early Syrian homesteaders attest to the fact that other forms of labor were an integral part of the homesteading process. Sometimes this strategy necessitated skirting the Homestead Act's residency requirement. Hassyn Juma filed on a homestead in Mountrail County, but worked at various professions including peddling and auto factory work in Detroit to finance his farm. Juma remarked, "I have never done any of my own farm work as I have always worked elsewhere at different trades."⁷⁷ While hiring out the work did not violate the law, not living on the land did. Siad Alle reported an absence from his homestead, "when he was working in

⁷⁷ North Dakota Writer's Project interview with Hassyn Alla Juma, SHSND.

the harvest fields . . . to get money to live for the winter.”⁷⁸ Samuel Nicola also worked out during the threshing season, earning about \$2.00 per day, and he used the money to improve his property. Deeby Zine peddled to make a living while she homesteaded near Williston. Zine made good money selling ladies' dresses, fancywork, and laces on her peddling routes between Montana and Minnesota.

Commutation

The Homestead Act also allowed settlers to gain title sooner by commuting or “buying out” their claims. In 1891, Congress stipulated that commutation required a period of fourteen months’ residency and the same improvements required by homesteaders, including building a dwelling and cultivating part of the property. The Land Act of 1820 established the legal authority for commutation. In order to settle the lands then considered “the West,” the federal government lowered the price of the public domain from \$2.00 per acre to \$1.25 per acre and reduced the minimum purchase from 160 to 80 acres. This law enabled more settlers to enter lands in the Old Northwest. Likewise, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, homestead commutation allowed cash-poor settlers time to raise funds to purchase their land, facilitating settlement. Many Syrian homesteaders, even Carl Nassif, who left the state after the bitter winter that took his toes, commuted their homestead claims.⁷⁹ GLO records indicate that many Syrians who had filed on homesteads ultimately commuted their claims.

⁷⁸ “Homestead Proof—Testimony of Claimant, Siad Alle” August 18, 1906, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁹ “Land Patent, Coram Nassif,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records Database, <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/> [accessed March 10, 2018].

Proving Whiteness & Proving Up

In 1909, Syrian homesteaders faced perhaps the most significant challenge to proving up on their claims: the question of their eligibility for citizenship. For Syrians, the Homestead Act's requirement that claimants be eligible for citizenship hinged on their racial categorization as White. The racial prerequisite for citizenship was established with the 1790 Naturalization Act, which limited U.S. nationality to "aliens being free white persons."⁸⁰ This original nationality law initially limited citizenship on the basis of race, excluding African Americans and "Indians not taxed." Until 1909, Syrians had filed for naturalization without issue, but the temper of American nativism and the new naturalization bureaucracy put in place by the 1906 Basic Naturalization Act threw their status as Whites, prospective Americans, and homesteaders into question.

From the bill's inception, the Homestead Act's naturalization requirement expanded and contracted the pool of claimants racially eligible to enter on federal lands. When the newly formed Republican Party embraced the idea of a homestead bill, they did so in order to attract the Democratic populace of the Old Northwest—German immigrants and Americans descended from the region's pioneer settlers. That the Homestead Act was available to immigrants who had only filed their declaration of intention was likely an inducement to these immigrant farmers. The law also reflected the ideological appeal of agrarian republicanism and "free soil," but according to Henry Nash Smith, their vision for a "classless society of the fee-simple empire had no place for [Black people]."⁸¹ Thus,

⁸⁰ *Naturalization Act of 1790*, 1 § 103, *U.S. Statutes at Large 1* (1845), 1st Cong., 2nd sess. (March 26, 1790).

⁸¹ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950 & 1978), 173.

when the law passed in 1862, the citizenship requirement barred African Americans from the homestead privilege. Only eight years later, in 1870, however, the Naturalization Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment extended citizenship to all persons born in the United States (except American Indians), and to “aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent” making freedmen eligible for citizenship, which legally, if not always practically, opened the homestead privilege to them as well.

But Reconstruction did not signal a progressive opening of American citizenship. The immigration and naturalization laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries strictly excluded Chinese immigrants. For politicians and statesmen, restricting Asian immigration and settlement had not always been a political imperative. In promoting a homestead bill in 1854, Senator William Seward predicted that within twenty years “a million freemen from Asia would be pouring into the trans-Mississippi every year...[and] the territories must be kept open for them.”⁸² The 1868 Burlingame-Seward Treaty promised Chinese workers the right to immigrate to the United States freely, and offered protection to Chinese citizens in the United States. But anti-Chinese sentiment in the American West, and particularly in California, created intense pressure for exclusion by the 1870s. Section fourteen of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act specified that “no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict are hereby repealed.”⁸³ Thus, by 1882, Chinese immigrants were ineligible for citizenship and thus barred from homesteading. In 1908, at the same time anti-Japanese

⁸² Smith, *Virgin Land*, 167.

⁸³ *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, Public Law 47-126, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (May 6, 1882).

Alien Land Laws were first debated in California, Oregon, Nevada, and elsewhere in the far West, Japanese homesteaders in Ward and Williams counties in North Dakota were denied their homestead claims because they did not meet the racial requirement for citizenship. On August 6, 1908, the *Jamestown Alert* reported that Japanese farmers had been “refused homestead rights” at the Minot Land Office. One Japanese homesteader “made an effort to prove up and...was denied by the land office officials...as the law expressly provides that citizenship cannot be granted to any of the Mongolian race.”⁸⁴ In 1909, Syrian homesteaders also confronted the racial boundaries of U.S. nationality law.

Charged with “all matters concerning the naturalization of aliens,” deciding aliens’ racial eligibility for citizenship based on the nebulous category of “White” was a challenge the Naturalization Division confronted.⁸⁵ Naturalization Chief Richard Campbell fielded questions from the courts on pressing matters of racial eligibility. Like many Americans during this period, Campbell considered “off-color races not only unfit, but as well undesirable additions to the body politic.”⁸⁶ Campbell also took little stock in the work of ethnologists who categorized South Asians as Aryans and Syrians as Caucasians.⁸⁷ Campbell argued that Whiteness ought to be determined by common understanding; he wrote: “The law confines the right to become naturalized to those who

⁸⁴ “Refused Homestead Rights,” *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, October 6, 1908.

⁸⁵ Marian L. Smith, “Race, Nationality, and Reality: INS Administration of Racial Provisions in U.S. Immigration and Nationality Law Since 1898, Part 2,” *Prologue Magazine* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2002), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/summer/immigration-law-2.html>, [accessed January 2018].

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

are white...[and] the average man in the street understands distinctly what it means, and would find no difficulty in assigning to the yellow race a Turk, or Syrian, with as much ease as he would bestow that designation on a Chinaman, or Korean.”⁸⁸ In 1908, Campbell advised the assistant U.S. attorney in Seattle to direct court clerks to refuse filing first papers on behalf of South Asians. In 1909, Campbell turned his attention to the case of Syrians, recommending they be denied citizenship on the grounds that they were Mongolian. The *Grand Forks Herald* reported that Campbell’s memorandum defining “free white persons” cited “an opinion ...that ...‘doubted whether the copper colored natives of America or the yellow or tawny races of Asiatics are white persons within the purpose of the law.’”⁸⁹ Campbell’s recommendation had serious implications for Syrian homesteaders proving up on their claims. The press reported “exceptional interest” in the matter in North Dakota, because of numerous pending cases in the state. In 1909 alone, over two hundred Syrians filed their first papers in North Dakota, most likely with the intention of taking homesteads.⁹⁰ According to the paper, “The matter is caught in the last ditch, after...applicants have been given first papers and filed on land, which they are now unable to secure.”⁹¹

The North Dakota press wrote sympathetically of the plight of Syrian homesteaders. The *Grand Forks Herald* explained the local effects of Campbell’s ruling:

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “Turks Are Not Of White Race: One of the Many Interesting Questions Solved by Naturalization Bureau,” *Grand Forks Herald*, September 27, 1909.

⁹⁰ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 71.

⁹¹ “Foreigners Win the First Round,” *The Evening Times*, November 8, 1909.

“As the situation is at present, many Syrians received their first papers five years ago, filed on land on which they have resided ever since. From present indications they will not be able to receive patent for the land unless some other interpretation of the law has been handed down.”⁹² A Persian homesteader faced the same situation, being rejected upon submitting his second papers: “the man had filed on land after receiving his first papers, laboring under the impression that...he would be able to secure title to a fine farm.” According to the *Jamestown Alert*, at least one of Stutsman County’s Syrian residents was denied citizenship on the grounds of “yellow race ancestry.”⁹³ The *Alert* explained Syrians’ probable exclusion on racial and religious grounds: that Syrians were said to be of the “Mongolian race,” alongside “Hindoos, Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, and other yellow races,” and that most Syrians “are Mohammedans, and devout believers in the Koran, which permits polygamy and which custom prevents citizenship in the United States.”⁹⁴ But the *Alert* did not seem to agree with Campbell’s assessment of the man’s eligibility for citizenship or racial identity. The paper argued in favor of the Syrian writing: “the applicant has a claim and considerable property, and is a family man speaking English. If he is prevented getting citizens papers he cannot make final proof.” The reporter did not agree with Campbell’s assertion that the common man could easily classify a Syrian as “Asian.” They wrote: “Personally, the applicant would not be taken for a member of the Mongolian race.” Other North Dakotans argued that the government

⁹² “Syrians in N.D. Barred By Ruling,” *Grand Forks Herald*, November 4, 1909.

⁹³ “Citizenship May Be Denied A Stutsman Co. Applicant on Grounds of Yellow Race Ancestry,” *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, September 23, 1909.

⁹⁴ During this period, approximately 90%-95% of Syrian immigrants to the United States were Christian; in North Dakota, by contrast, approximately 70% were Christian.

was at fault in the matter. One “well informed citizen” remarked that “[i]f Syrians are to be barred from citizenship, the government should not have accepted their first papers and allowed them to file on land.”⁹⁵ Campbell’s guidance for the courts also created problems for federal officials at the Department of the Interior’s General Land Office, who accepted homestead applications from aliens later deemed racially ineligible to citizenship, and had difficulty issuing patents when the homesteader was unable to naturalize.⁹⁶ According to Marian L. Smith, “often judges... would admit racially ineligible homesteaders to citizenship as a protest to conflicting federal practices.”⁹⁷

On November 20, 1909, Dr. T. H. David (Tanous Habib Daoud), a Syrian homesteader and physician who settled near Rugby, North Dakota, wrote an editorial refuting Campbell’s order to deny Syrians’ right to naturalize. David was uniquely positioned to come to his compatriots’ defense because of his command of the English language. He was born in Rachaya, Syria, and educated at an English missionary school in Damascus, where he later taught for two years. He immigrated to the United States to study medicine and to join his brothers, who were homesteading in North Dakota. David filed his first papers in Pierce County in 1901 and became a U.S. citizen in 1906. By 1909, David was well established in North Dakota, having served as president of the

⁹⁵ “Syrians in N.D. Barred by Ruling,” *Grand Forks Herald*, November 4, 1909.

⁹⁶ Smith, “Race and Reality,” n.p.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

state's Agricultural Society, and had founded and managed a U.S. post office (which he named Beirut) on his brothers' farm.⁹⁸

In his editorial, David directly addressed Naturalization Chief Campbell, arguing that Syrians were “free white people.” Describing Syrians in this way, David drew directly from the language of the 1790 Naturalization Act.⁹⁹ Like other Syrians defending their Whiteness during this period, David emphasized Syrians' Christian heritage and contribution to Western civilization.¹⁰⁰ He remarked that Jesus Christ himself would be refused citizenship if Campbell's interpretation remained in effect. David patriotically heralded the United States' rhetorical commitment to equality, but he never challenged the notion that citizenship ought to be restricted by race. He wrote: “We, the Syrians, hardly believe that a wise and just government like this whose constitution...made all eligible men equal in the eyes of the law, intends to prevent the naturalization of the Syrians and other white people...on the supposition that they are of Mongolian stock when...the Syrian race are of Aryan descent.” Ultimately, David expressed contempt for Campbell himself, charging the official with “ignorance and personal hatred” toward the Syrian people. David reminded the naturalization chief that the United States was a nation of immigrants, and that Campbell's forbears were immigrants too, writing, “have you forgotten that your ancestors entered this land as foreigners and strangers.” This now

⁹⁸ Basil M. Kherbawi, *History of the United States and History of the Syrian Immigration* (New York: N.G. Badran), 1913. (Arabic language, translated by Zack Razek)

⁹⁹ T.H. David, “Asks Reason for Syrian Exclusion,” *Grand Forks Herald*, November 20, 1909.

¹⁰⁰ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 57.

familiar argument in favor of more liberal immigration and naturalization laws did not move Campbell, but the naturalization chief's order did not stand for long.

Pro-immigrant groups rallied behind the Syrian cause. New York immigrant advocate Justin S. Kirrah campaigned on behalf of Syrians and others targeted by Campbell's ruling. Kirrah accused Campbell of "personal malice" and of interfering with the work of the courts.¹⁰¹ The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) appealed to Commerce and Labor Secretary Charles Nagle about the denial of naturalization to Syrians, Armenians, Palestinians, and Jews; like David, the UAHC argued that Campbell's order would "exclude David and Isaih and even Jesus of Nazareth himself."¹⁰² In response, Secretary Nagle admonished Campbell for attempting to decide for the courts. On December 15, 1909, the *Bismarck Tribune* published a new order from Campbell to the clerks of courts exercising jurisdiction in naturalization proceedings. Campbell directed the clerks to "disregard any request or direction heretofore made...to refuse to receive or file declarations of intentions or petitions for naturalization by reason of any meaning hitherto given by the division of naturalization to the words, white persons and persons of African nativity or descent."¹⁰³ The Naturalization Department was advised to leave the matter of interpretation to the courts.

Thus those Syrians denied citizenship, and whose homesteads were immediately at stake were safe, at least for the moment. As the *Tribune* reported, "Whether citizenship

¹⁰¹ Smith, "Race and Reality," n.p.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ "New Naturalization Order is Cancelled," *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, December 15, 1909.

papers will be approved by the department after the petitions have been filed, is another matter, but it is presumed that if any alien is started on the road to naturalization, he will not be headed off at the last moment, when the matter of securing a patent to a homestead may be at stake.”¹⁰⁴ The *Herald* reported that “foreigners win the first round” but that “no decision has been handed down that entitles Syrians, Turks, Persians, Egyptians, Arabs and others of their kin to naturalize as American citizens, United States district attorneys have been notified to hold in abeyance all proceedings in opposition.”¹⁰⁵

Syrians navigated the uncertainty of their racial status in various ways. Hearing of the fate of their Japanese neighbors’ claims, in 1909, almost two hundred Syrians in North Dakota filed their first papers, likely in anticipation of taking land.¹⁰⁶ There is also some indication that Syrians fled the state during this period. A *Bismarck Tribune* headline of August 31, 1910 proclaimed that “Syrians do not like the state,” and were abandoning their year-old settlement near Spiritwood, North Dakota. The *Tribune* reported that the Syrians had found farming in the northern plains “too strenuous” and a “poor investment,” but one wonders if the unsettled question of their naturalization status and potential for proving up may have played a role in their decision to abandon their claims after only one year of settlement. As the paper reported, the Syrians “brought more money [to North Dakota] than they will take back.”¹⁰⁷ Finally, as with immigration

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “Foreigners Win the First Round,” *The Evening Times* (Grand Forks, North Dakota), November 8, 1909.

¹⁰⁶ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 71.

¹⁰⁷ “Syrians Do Not Like the State,” *Bismarck Tribune*, August 31, 1910.

restriction, threats of ineligibility encouraged some to break the law. In 1910, an Iowa District Attorney vowed to put an end to Syrians' fraudulent use of naturalization papers in the state. According to the report, in Cedar Rapids and Sioux City, "naturalization frauds have been discovered...[and citizenship papers] have been passed from one Syrian to another...as all Syrians look very much alike." In one case, Joseph George, "the king of the local Syrian colony' was charged with...representing himself to be Joseph Nassif, a dead Syrian, whose naturalization papers he appropriated."¹⁰⁸

In 1914, Syrian immigrant George Dow was twice denied naturalization in the District Court of South Carolina. In both cases, the judges were of the opinion that White persons were individuals of European ancestry, and that Syrians were "Asiatics," like Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and ineligible for citizenship. Both district judges emphasized the fact that citizenship was a function of sovereignty, and that the racial restriction was neither discriminatory nor necessarily logical. District Judge Henry Augustus Middleton Smith wrote in his decision, "The admission of a foreigner to the privilege of citizenship in a country is wholly a matter for the people of that country. They may be as capricious and unreasonable as they see fit about it. It is a voluntary donation to be extended and denied according to the whims of the donor."¹⁰⁹ But the law was discriminatory and it had far reaching outcomes for Asian immigrants ineligible for citizenship.

The implications of this sovereign whim were particularly devastating for Asian immigrant farmers during the homestead era, and as the fever for Alien Land Laws swept

¹⁰⁸ "After Offending Syrians," *Times-Republican* (Marshalltown, Iowa), April 7, 1910.

¹⁰⁹ *Ex Parte Dow*, 226 F. 145 (4th Cir. 1914).

the trans-Mississippi West. Like the Homestead Act, many western states restricted the right to property ownership to those eligible for naturalization. California passed the first Alien Land Law in 1913, and eventually, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Washington, Texas, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, Louisiana, Idaho, Montana, Kansas, and Arkansas also instituted Alien Land Laws that excluded immigrants “ineligible for citizenship” from owning and even leasing property. Like disease, poverty, and contract labor in the realm of federal immigration law, “ineligible for citizenship” became a racial code for exclusion from property ownership in land.¹¹⁰ In the words of Rose Cuison Villazor, “the phrase ‘aliens ineligible to citizenship’...constituted a euphemism employed to cover up the law’s underlying discriminatory intent.”¹¹¹

On September 14, 1915, George Dow was granted “Caucasian” racial status and the right to naturalize by the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. While on the one hand the justices refuted the argument that only Europeans were to be classed as Whites, they also suggested that Syrians’ Whiteness derived from their historic admixture with Europeans. Justice Woods wrote that “the present inhabitants [of Greater Syria] have racial descent from many different sources. Yet, as of opinion at the time of the enactment of the statute now in force was that they were so closely related to their neighbors on the European side of the Mediterranean that they should be classed as white.”¹¹² For Syrians, as opposed to African Americans subjected to the “one drop rule,” mixed racial descent imparted White racial status.

¹¹⁰ Villazor, “Rediscovering *Oyama v. California*,” 984.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 992.

¹¹² *Dow v. United States*, 226 F. 145 (4th Cir. 1915).

Dow v. United States cemented Syrians' right to citizenship and by extension to the homestead privilege—for Syrians, Whiteness as property was literal. Citizenship also conferred the right to vote, to hold public office, and protection against deportation. In the era of Asian exclusion, Whiteness safeguarded Syrians from state bars to property ownership and leaseholds targeting "aliens ineligible to citizenship," and anti-miscegenation laws barring "Mongolians" from marrying Whites. But "Whiteness as property" has connotations not implied in the Fourth Circuit Court's ruling; while *Dow* granted Syrians legal Whiteness and the privileges of citizenship, it did not necessarily endow them with social Whiteness—what Albion Tourgee, W.E.B. DuBois, and others theorized as the value of one's *status property or reputation* as White. Syrians' social Whiteness tended to depend on other factors such as phenotype, religious affiliation, class, and facility with the English language.

Like Syrian immigrants, American Indians' U.S. citizenship was tied to private property ownership, and in the early twentieth century, increasingly to their proximity to Whiteness. In 1875, the Indian Homestead Act created a basis for Indigenous Americans to claim U.S. citizenship through private property ownership. The law stipulated that Indians who renounced tribal loyalties and embraced private property would be eligible for the homestead privilege, and the right to citizenship. The Indian Homestead Act provided a foundation for the devastating Dawes Severalty Act or General Allotment Act of 1887.¹¹³ The provisions of the Dawes Act specified that American Indians who took allotments and disavowed their tribal allegiances would be eligible for citizenship. The

¹¹³ D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

Indian Homestead Act and the Dawes Act aimed to delegitimize Indigenous forms of land use and title and to legitimize Euro-American ones. Whites who sought to “reform” or assimilate Indians, viewed private property ownership as the key to instilling the values of “civilized” life. This construction of citizenship inverted the requirement for immigrants—while immigrants first declared their intention to become citizens to claim lands, American Indians had to first accept allotments, thereby legitimizing U.S. legal and cultural norms of property as fully alienable land in fee simple ownership. These inverse paths toward naturalization also suggests that immigrants “eligible for citizenship” were prepared for their civic rights and responsibilities, while American Indians were not. In 1906, the same year Congress passed the Basic Naturalization Act, the Burke Act or Forced Fee Patenting Act required the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to assess whether American Indians were “competent and capable” before conveying fee simple patents as opposed to trust patents, which were inalienable for a period of twenty-five years. In addition, citizenship would not be granted to Indians until the end of the trust period or until competency had been granted. “Competency” came to hinge on an Indians’ White blood quantum, or degree of White ancestry.¹¹⁴ In April 1891, Special Agent Benjamin S. Miller was sent to Fort Berthold Indian Reservation to secure the necessary signatures to move forward with allotment.

Aisha Mostafa

In 1914, “Isha Mostaf” (Aisha Mostafa) received the patent for her eighty-acre homestead—the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 24, and the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 25 in

¹¹⁴ Erik M. Zissu, “The Importance of Being White,” in *Blood Matters: The Five Civilized Tribes and the Search for Unity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 37-50.

Township 157N, Range 92 West.¹¹⁵ On her first papers, Mostafa reported that she had immigrated to the United States from Damascus, Syria, through the port of New York on December 15, 1906. But border records show that she actually immigrated through Mexico at El Paso, Texas on March 16, 1907; her final destination was listed as Pittsburg, Kansas.¹¹⁶ On May 29, 1909, when she filed her declaration of intention to become a citizen, she was thirty-five years old, divorced with a son, and working as a housekeeper in Stanley, North Dakota. As her name indicates, Mostafa was part of Mountrail County's Muslim community.¹¹⁷ Sherman, Whitney, and Guerrero have written that, while many Syrian *Christian* women homesteaded, “[i]n Mountrail County, where most of the Lebanese settlers were of Muslim faith, *not one of the seventy-one claimants was a woman.*” (emphasis added)¹¹⁸ As Aisha Mostafa's land entry case file demonstrates, there was at least one Muslim woman homesteader in Mountrail County. Mostafa's first papers describe her as a White woman of dark complexion, five feet four inches tall, with brown eyes and black hair. In her declaration of intention, Mostafa renounced her allegiance to Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of Turkey, and pledged her allegiance to the United States of

¹¹⁵ “Homestead Certificate, Isha Mostaf,” June 9, 1914, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁶ “Statistical Index Cards of Aliens Arriving at El Paso, Texas, 1905-1927, Aisha Mostafa,” NAI: 2843448, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787-2004, Record Group 85, Microfilm Roll Number 082, National Archives and Records Administration; Washington D.C., Ancestry.com, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1082&h=7926645&tid=&pid=&queryId=3804d680f4ddcb8d9e9e2e000e1c0b9&usePUB=true&_phsrc=pIW1247&_phstart=successSource, [accessed May 2019].

¹¹⁷ Mostafa means “the chosen one” in Arabic, and is an epithet for the Prophet Muhammed. Aisha is the name of Muhammed's third wife, daughter of Abu Bakr.

¹¹⁸ Sherman, Whitney, and Guerrero, 129.

America. Two women, Stella Frederickson and Bessie Cover, stood as witnesses when she signed the document as “Isha Mostaf” with an “X.” Exactly one month later, she filed her Homestead Entry at the Minot Land Office.

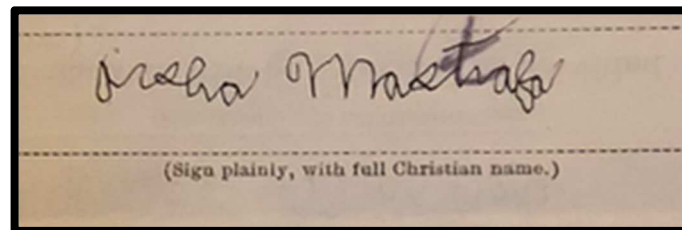


Figure 16 "Homestead Certification, Isha Mostaf," June 9, 1914, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

At the age of forty-one, Mostafa began the process of entering her final homestead proof. She presented her application for final proof at the U.S. Land Office at Minot, where she had entered on her claim. According to her testimony, she had established residency, built a ten-by-twelve-foot house of lumber, a twenty-six-by-thirty-foot sod barn, and dug a fifteen-foot-deep well. In 1911, she planted a one-acre garden; in 1912, she broke and planted seven acres of flax, but harvested nothing because the crop froze. In 1913, the year of her filing, Mostafa planted ten acres and broke three additional. She estimated the value of these improvements at \$225.00. Unlike her Homestead Entry, which she had signed with an “X” next to her misspelled name, Mostafa’s shaky signature appears, spelled correctly, as “Aisha Mostafa,” in English, on

the line specifying “sign plainly, with full Christian name.”¹¹⁹ Her entry also shows that she had been through this process before—Mostafa had previously proved up on sixty acres nearby—lot 2, section 6, township 156N.¹²⁰ These homesteads provided Mostafa and her heirs with a significant asset in land.¹²¹

Before March 3, 1891, Mostafa’s property was part of Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. In 1886, three U.S. commissioners obtained consent for the cession of two-thirds of the reservation, and for allotment of the remaining lands—to which some tribal members objected. But representatives of the Three Tribes agreed, marking the document with Xs next to their transliterated names. The treaty was ratified by Congress in 1891. Three years later, the ceded lands were opened to White settlers like Aisha Mostafa.

¹¹⁹ “Homestead Entry: Final Proof, Testimony of Claimant,” August 25, 1913, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁰ “Declaration of Intention, Isha Mostaf,” June 29, 1909, Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

¹²¹ Trina Williams, “Homestead Act: A Major Asset-Building Policy in American History,” *Inclusion in Asset Building: Research and Policy Symposium*, Center for Social Development, Washington University, St. Louis, September 21-23, 2000, 1-24.



Figure 7 Plat Map showing Aisha Mostafa's homesteads in Manitou Township, North Dakota. Standard Atlas of Mountrail County, North Dakota (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1917), State Historical Society of North Dakota

PART THREE: RECKONING

**PROLOGUE: THE FIRST GENERATION: BESHARA ABU RIZK, OR
CHARLIE THOMAS ABOUREZK**

On May 16, 1898, Beshara Abu Rizk and four family members disembarked the *S.S. La Gascogne*,¹ which had carried them from the bustling immigrant waypoint of Le Havre, France, to Castle Garden at the Port of New York.² Abu Rizk, who upon immigrating changed his name to Charles Thomas Abourezk (Charlie), was born on April 7, 1871, in the village of Kfeir on the steep slopes of Jabal Al-Shaykh in Greater Syria. According to the ship's manifest, "Beshara Abourezk" was a single, twenty-four-year-old farmer from Beirut. Charlie carried just \$42.50 of "show money" (see Chapter Two) in his pocket, informing immigration officials that he was headed to "Cattsburg," South Dakota to reunite with four older brothers. Charlie, who was actually the eldest of three brothers, meant to say "Gettysburg," South Dakota.³ In many ways, the story of Charlie's life after disembarking the *La Gascogne* encapsulates the immigrant American Dream; he arrived in the United States with near nothing, and through hard work and the privileges of Whiteness and citizenship, ascended the socioeconomic ladder.

Like many late nineteenth and early twentieth century Syrians, Charlie immigrated to the United States to join kin already working homesteads and peddling in the upper Midwest. Charlie's brother Elias had immigrated to the United States in 1892, and

¹ In his memoir, Abourezk wrote that the ship's name was the *S.S. Bordeaux*.

² Bechara Abourezk, *New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957* Ancestry.com. [database on-line]; Year: 1898; Arrival: New York, New York, USA; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Line: 20; Page Number: 8.

³ James G. Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent: Memoirs of South Dakota and the U.S. Senate* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989), 7.

traveled back to Kfeir to accompany his wife, two daughters, and Charlie to their new home in southcentral South Dakota. Charlie filed his first papers, or declaration of intention, in 1900, making him eligible for the homestead privilege. The Abourezk brothers—Charlie, Elias, and Michael—received patents on homesteads in Lyman, Potter, and Tripp counties between 1904 and 1907.⁴ Other members of the Abourezk clan—Carl, George, and Nassib—also homesteaded in the area. Charlie commuted a 160-acre claim in Lyman county on May 7, 1907, just two years before the naturalization controversy threatened Syrian homestead claims.

The lands homesteaded by Charlie and Elias had once been part of the Great Sioux Reservation, established by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty (also called the 1868 Sioux Treaty). Between 1868 and 1889, all of West River, South Dakota, was part of the Great Sioux Reservation.⁵ Two years after the passage of the Dawes Act (1887), Congress partitioned the reservation, creating five smaller reserves in its place, including Pine Ridge and Rosebud, where the Abourezk family ultimately settled.⁶

Around 1902-1903, while proving up his claim further north in Lyman County, Charlie and other members of the Abourezk clan peddled linens, spices, and other notions to fellow homesteaders and on the Rosebud. The family stationed themselves in the town of Bonesteel, in Gregory County, near the South Dakota-Nebraska border. When Gregory

⁴ Bureau of Land Management, “Land Patent Search,” digital images, *General Land Office Records* (<http://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/PatentSearch> : accessed [11 Nov 2019]), [Charles Abourezk] ([Lyman], [South Dakota]), homestead patent no. [SDMTAA 063861].

⁵ West River refers to all South Dakota lands west of the Missouri River.

⁶ The five reservations include: Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Rosebud, Pine Ridge, and Lower Brulé.

was first opened to homesteaders, Charlie made money selling snow cones during the land rush, and also worked in Bonesteel as a frontier marshal. In 1905, Charlie worked as a guard for the Vivian Bank, spending long nights at the bank to fulfill his duties.⁷ But Charlie and his kin eventually established themselves as peddlers and merchants in the area.⁸ In the Dakotas and Oklahoma, Syrian peddlers found Indian reservations to be profitable places to sell their wares. In 1903, the Sioux Falls *Argus-Leader* reported the arrest of four Syrian peddlers for the crime of selling goods on reservations without a government license.⁹ The peddlers had also been expelled from the Yankton and Lower Brule Reservations. Apparently, the roving merchants “hurried [to the Rosebud] and started to do business” after “hearing the Indians were expecting payments of \$2,500.”

As elsewhere, Syrian peddlers in South Dakota lived a precarious existence trekking in remote areas over primitive roads and trails. In 1903, Elias was robbed of over fifty dollars by two “halfbreed highwaymen” on the road between the Rosebud, where he had earned the cash, and Bonesteel, where he, Charlie, and other members of the Abourezk clan lived.¹⁰ Alexander Abourezk, who also peddled out of Bonesteel, died in a storm on the Rosebud and his scattered remains were found on the reservation several years later.¹¹

⁷ Mellette County Historical Society, *Mellette County, 1911-1986* (White River, South Dakota: Mellette County Centennial Committee, 1961), 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “Syrians are in Trouble” *Argus-Leader*, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, July 18, 1903.

¹⁰ “Halfbreed Highwaymen: Syrian Peddler Robbed of all his Money on the Rosebud,” *Minneapolis Journal*, November 28, 1903.

¹¹ “Skull Found on Rosebud,” *Norfolk Weekly News*, Norfolk, South Dakota, May 17, 1907.

In his early days, Charlie peddled his goods on foot, often lodging with his Indian customers for the night.¹²

The money Charlie made peddling likely helped him to commute, or pay cash, for his homestead in Lyman County in 1907, and to make a return trip back home to Syria. Plat maps of the area show that Charlie sold the southeast quarter of section twenty, in township 104N-078W, shortly after he purchased the claim—by 1911, his neighbor, W.E. Sweeney owned the 160-acre parcel.¹³ The same year Charlie commuted his homestead, he returned to Kfeir to marry and start a family. The timing of the commutation suggests that Charlie may have sold his property to finance the return voyage and courtship of his future wife. Many Syrian men immigrated to the United States as “birds of passage,” to earn money and return home richer than they had left; approximately one-third of Ottoman immigrants returned to their homelands.¹⁴ Kemal H. Karpat points out that during this period “there was an endless traffic between Syria and the Americas: a bride from the native village would come to marry some immigrant...and would be followed by countless brothers, sisters, cousins, and in-laws.”¹⁵ Back home in Kfeir, Charlie met and married Juliana “Lena” Mikel, his eighteen-year-old distant cousin, and the young couple had two children—Helen and Chick. In 1911, Charlie returned to the United States, promising to send for his family when he had earned enough money. That year,

¹² Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 8.

¹³ *Standard Atlas of Lyman County, South Dakota* (Chicago, George A. Ogle & Co., 1911), 61.

¹⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (May 1995): 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

Charlie filed his first papers once again, perhaps upon having decided to settle in the United States permanently.

World War I was a period of extreme hardship for Lena and the children back in Syria. Allied forces blockaded the Eastern Mediterranean and Jamal Pasha barred all crops from entering Mount Lebanon, causing widespread starvation. Adding to the economic hardships brought on by the war, a plague of locusts devoured local crops, which resulted in famine and a staggering death toll—half of the regional population of Mount Lebanon Mutsarrifate. The war severed the very limited lines of communication between the United States and Syria, and Charlie was unable to send remittances to his wife and children. Lena’s memories of the war years were so painful that she never returned to her home country and rarely spoke of her early life there.¹⁶

In spite of the many hardships of life in frontier South Dakota, the Abourezks slowly ascended the economic ladder. Plying his trade at first on foot with a heavy peddler’s pack on his back, Charlie purchased a horse and later a buggy to haul his merchandise. Upon his return, two years after the Rosebud had been opened to White settlers, Charlie opened his first store, which was then on the Rosebud, in Wood, South Dakota—C. Abourezk Mercantile, later called Abourezk’s Store. He set up shop in a building vacated by the law office of Talbott and Doherty, and batched with Bert Humphrey, an early freighter who transported the store’s first load of groceries from nearby Winner, South Dakota.¹⁷ Charlie’s World War I draft registration card described him as a forty-five-year-old White man, tall and stout, with brown hair and light blue eyes; he was by then a

¹⁶ *Millette County*, 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

naturalized citizen and self-employed merchant. In 1920, Charlie opened his second store in Mission, also on the Rosebud.

Charlie's stores were simple outfits that relied primarily on government vouchers and Indian customers. Both stores were approximately one-hundred feet long by twenty-four feet wide, furnished with plank floors and wood-burning stoves. Charlie sold dry goods in bulk, some produce, eggs, hardware, and clothing. They were the typical clerk-behind-the-counter operations of their day.¹⁸ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, U.S. government policy aimed to assimilate American Indians by turning them into private property owning small farmers—the yeoman ideal that inspired both the Homestead Act and the Dawes Act. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) stationed a “boss farmer” to teach Indians on the Rosebud to farm, but this failed experiment transformed the Indian agent's job into one of issuing purchase orders and vouchers to Indians who acquired life's necessities from stores like Charlie's. Although Charlie faced lean years, including bankruptcies during the Great Depression, his businesses provided livelihoods for himself and his extended family.

When the denouement of World War I finally, and briefly, reopened the trails from Syria to the United States, Lena, Helen, and Chick finally reunited with Charlie on the Rosebud.¹⁹ Immigration records show that Charlie's brother Elias made a return trip to Syria in the fall of 1919 to retrieve his sister-in-law, niece, and nephew. Because Charlie was a U.S. citizen, his wife and children were automatically U.S. citizens. At that time Elias was also a citizen, having filed his first papers in 1898, the year he returned to Syria

¹⁸ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 15.

¹⁹ The 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act would close those trails once again.

to retrieve his own wife, children, and Charlie.²⁰ Elias operated a real estate business and seems to have been politically well-connected. South Dakota Congressman Harry Gandy personally vouched for Elias and Lena, even claiming that he knew her in a note to the State Department attached to the passport application.²¹

With the exception of his brief return to Syria, by the time his wife and children arrived in Wood, Charlie had lived and worked in the area for over twenty years. During those years, Charlie's affability and generosity had earned him many friends—particularly among the Indians who made up a large proportion of his clientele. Charlie did not much like to talk about the past, with one exception: the day Lena, Helen, and Chick arrived at the Rosebud in 1920. As the story goes, because of their fondness for Charlie, a party of Rosebud Indians staged a powwow to welcome his family to the reservation. Adorned in full regalia, the welcome committee came to the Abourezk's one-room abode dancing, singing, and playing the drums. Unfamiliar with Sioux custom, Lena grabbed Helen and Chick and barred the door in fear for their lives. Considering the trauma Lena suffered in the Old Country during the war, and the strangeness of her new surroundings, her hyper-vigilance seems unsurprising.

²⁰ South Dakota Historical Society, "Naturalization Records Index," accessed December 2019, <https://history.sd.gov/archives/naturalization.aspx>

²¹ Elias Abourezk, *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925*, Ancestry.com, [database online];

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 895; Volume #: Roll 0895 - Certificates: 112500-112749, 03 Sep 1919-04 Sep 1919.

Over time, the Abourezks became a prominent family in the small town of Wood. Lena learned the language and culture of the small South Dakota town; she took on the role of “society matron,” joining the Ladies Aid Society and Eastern Star. Still, she continued to cook traditional Lebanese food at home, the family listened to Arabic music on the Victrola, and they spent time socializing with Syrian friends and family in the area. At the same time, Charlie’s business and political interests expanded; in addition to the stores, he opened a movie theater in Wood, purchased a ranch and other properties in the area, and served as mayor of the small town for some sixteen years. Though he would not live to see it, Charlie passed on his interest in local politics to his youngest son James George Abourezk.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DESCENDANTS: JAMES GEORGE ABOUREZK, WOUNDED KNEE, AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

On December 29, 1890, the United States Army infamously massacred a band of Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, during a campaign to suppress the Ghost Dance religion. Eighty-three years later, more than two hundred Oglala Lakota and American Indian Movement (AIM) activists seized the historic hamlet of Wounded Knee, located near Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The activists occupied Wounded Knee with the consent and direction of eight traditional medicine men and chiefs in an effort to dramatize what participants described as the “complete tyranny and suppression of the Oglala and all American Indian people.”¹ To end the siege, the protestors demanded action from three United States senators: William Fulbright (D-AK), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and James Abourezk (D-SD). The senators chaired committees with whom collaboration was critical to advancing a principal objective of the movement—self-determination. Fulbright chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Kennedy, the Subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedures; and Abourezk, the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. The activists demanded Abourezk convene the Indian Affairs subcommittee “for a complete investigation of all Sioux Reservations in South Dakota.”²

Like the first confrontation between the federal government and the Mineconjou Lakota (Sioux) at Wounded Knee, the 1973 occupation was a moment rife with

¹ “List of Demands,” February 27, 1973, James G. Abourezk Wounded Knee 1973 Series, University of South Dakota Archives and Special Collections, Vermillion, SD.

² *Ibid.*

symbolism. If the Wounded Knee massacre had once symbolized “the end of the Indian,” the seventy-one-day occupation showed that Indians and Indian resistance had, in reality, never died out. Those who occupied Wounded Knee in 1973 were the literal and figurative descendants of those slaughtered on the bitter cold Plains in 1890, continuing in a longstanding tradition of Indigenous resistance and survival.³

In the years following the seventy-one-day standoff at Wounded Knee, Abourezk pursued AIM’s mandate, convening the landmark American Indian Policy Review Commission to investigate the state of the Federal-Indian relationship and to address the exceptional challenges Native peoples and nations faced. It was also a turning point in Abourezk’s political career. Although he had championed American Indian rights before the standoff, after Wounded Knee the freshman senator placed Native issues at the top of his legislative agenda. During his single term in the Senate, Abourezk was the primary sponsor of some forty pieces of legislation devoted to American Indian rights in areas including: education, child welfare, land rights, jurisdiction, and reparations.⁴ Though he did not publicly endorse the militant tactics of Red Power, Abourezk did support their political agenda. After Wounded Knee, Abourezk served as a conduit between Indigenous activists and Congress, championing reform and federal recognition of Indian sovereignty.

³ See David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native American from 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019).

⁴ United States Congress, “Legislation Sponsored or Cosponsored by Senator James Abourezk,” accessed January 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/member/james-abourezk>.

I use the term “ally” to describe Abourezk’s political work on behalf of American Indians. Allyship suggests a dynamic in which Whites and other privileged groups work toward ending systemic marginalization. Abourezk’s social and geographic positionality—a White man in Indian Country—were established in the first, or immigrant generation, with his father Charlie Abourezk’s legacy of migration, Whiteness, and upward mobility. Abourezk used his political power to support the cause of self-determination by promoting Indian leadership and guidance of the reform process. As an ally of the movement, he sought to make good the United States’ legal and moral obligations to its Indigenous peoples.

Wounded Knee 1973 occurred at the crest of civil rights militancy. As with the modern Black freedom struggle, the origins of Red Power can be traced to post-war anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideologies. Changing federal Indian policy also spurred activism, as the Termination and Relocation policies of the 1950s threatened the very foundations of American Indian life and tribal sovereignty. By the mid-1960s, American Indian activists adopted the strategies, language, and to some extent the ideological commitments of the larger civil rights struggle. Like non-violent direct action protests, the armed occupations of Alcatraz Island, the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in the nation’s capital, and Wounded Knee all pressed for a federal response and dramatized the American Indian struggle, bringing Native grievances into public consciousness.

Abourezk’s political work on behalf of American Indian rights reinforces and expands upon the growing literature on Arab American activism and allyship.⁵ Arab

⁵ See for example, Lawrence Davidson, “Debating Palestine: Arab-American Challenges to Zionism, 1917-1932,” in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 227-240; Sarah M.A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of

American political activism has spanned over a century, from the early migration of Syrians to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the early 1900s, Syrians organized in their struggle for Whiteness and citizenship; but over the past century, Arab American political activism centered primarily on homeland politics. Between the First and Second World Wars, Arab Americans advocated for Syrian nationalist and Palestinian causes, and the question of Palestine has remained at the heart of Arab American political work. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab Americans formed political and scholarly organizations to draw attention to their causes, aligning themselves with non-White civil rights and Third World Liberation struggles. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Arab American activists formed interethnic alliances to further anti-racism and anti-imperialism, but their allyship aimed primarily to garner support for the liberation of Palestine and a more equitable U.S.-Middle East policy.⁶

The literature on Arab American political work has also elucidated the co-formation of Arab American activism and racial and ethnic identity. Hani Bawardi argues that the development of a distinct “Arab American” ethnic identity flowed from the transnational

California Press, 2009); Sarah M.A. Gualtieri, “The Syrian of Sleepy Lagoon: Ethnic Coalitions and Archival Silence,” *American Quarterly* 71 (June 2019), 425-447; Hani J. Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Salim Yaqub, “Our Declaration of Independence”: African Americans, Arab Americans, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1979,” *Mashriq & Mahjar* 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.24847/33i2015.61> [accessed June 2020].

⁶ See especially Pennock, *Arab American Left*, Yaqub, “Our Declaration of Independence,” and Gualtieri, “Sleepy Lagoon.”

political labors of immigrants whose allegiances straddled the United States and the Arab world in the early twentieth century. Others point to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War as the catalyst for Arab American political organizing and ethnic identity formation. At the same time, late twentieth century U.S.-Middle East politics gave rise to growing anti-Arab sentiment in the United States, shifting some Arab Americans' racial self-identification from White to non-White.⁷

Abourezk's story can be understood within this literature but departs from it as well. While the history of Arab American civil rights activism and interethnic solidarity has been rightly situated in a transnational U.S.-Middle East framework, Abourezk's allyship with American Indians emerged from regional and local contexts, relationships, and experiences. Sarah Gualtieri has recently uncovered a story of interethnic cooperation in the activism of George Shibley, a Syrian American attorney who defended twenty-one Mexican American men in the 1942 Sleepy Lagoon murder trial, a precursor to the infamous Zoot Suit riots in Los Angeles.⁸ In her article, "The Syrian of Sleepy Lagoon," Gualtieri shows how Shibley's involvement in this and other controversial cases grew from his own experience as an ethnic minority in Los Angeles living side-by-side with the Mexican American community. Like Shibley, Abourezk's activism grew from the unique ethno-racial landscape of his home state of South Dakota. Abourezk was born and raised on Rosebud Indian Reservation, home of the *Sicangu Oyate* (Upper Brulé Sioux) and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Compared with the existing literature on Arab American

⁷ This literature focuses primarily on post-war California.

⁸ Gualtieri, "Sleepy Lagoon."

activism, Abourezk's brand of allyship is unique in that it was informed primarily by "indigenous"—not transnational—politics and identities.⁹

Identities are complex and nested, ranging from the national, racial, and ethnic, to religious, regional, and local, among many other categories. While studies of Arab American activism and identity formation have centered on the co-creation of political activism and macro and meso-scale identities—transnational, racial, and ethnic—Abourezk's story highlights the importance of micro-scale contexts which are often ripe for interethnic and interracial conflict but also for allyship and solidarity. Abourezk grew up in a county where the ethnic majority were Sioux and this proximity nurtured his political allyship. As recent civil rights movement scholarship illustrates, the diversity of the American West cultivated multi-racial and multi-ethnic civil rights work as early as the 1940s, producing figures like Shibley and Abourezk.¹⁰

Although I examine Abourezk's activism and Wounded Knee 1973 in the context of the civil rights movement, it is important to draw distinctions between the American Indian struggle and that of the broader civil rights movement in the United States.

⁹ Those who have studied Abourezk's political work have primarily focused on his activism on behalf of Arab and Arab American issues—U.S. Middle-East foreign policy and anti-Arab discrimination. This literature focuses on Abourezk's civil rights organization, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), which combats anti-Arab discrimination and bias and promotes a balanced U.S.-Middle East policy. See Pennock, *Arab American Left*, and Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers*.

¹⁰ See for example, George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Allison Varzally, *Making an Non-White America: Californians Coloring outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Although American Indians, like U.S. ethnic minorities, have confronted racism, discrimination, and economic inequality, they also have a distinct, and often fraught, double citizenship—citizens of the United States and of sovereign Indian nations within the United States. For Indian tribes and individuals, the goal of upholding sovereignty and treaty rights separates their experience from that of other racial and ethnic minorities. This distinction has made domestic interracial and interethnic alliances and coalitions transitory. As Native scholars David E. Wilkins and K. Tsainina Lomawaima point out, “American Indian nations, because of their sovereign status as small nations with treaty-based rights, have historically not engaged in many permanent coalitions or alliances with non-Native groups because the thrust of Indigenous efforts—to retain their extraconstitutional and separate governmental status—is fundamentally different from that of all other groups and individuals.”¹¹ During the 1960s and 1970s, however, young urban Indian activists adopted the tactics of the civil rights movement to bring media attention to the Indian struggle.¹² In doing so, Red Power advocates sought to restore and protect treaty rights and government-to-government relations between Indian nations and the United States.

The unique relationship between Congress and American Indian nations made Abourezk a key ally for the Red Power movement. The U.S. Constitution defined this relationship in two clauses, giving Congress the power to make treaties and to regulate commerce with Indian tribes. The Constitution thus granted the legislative branch

¹¹ David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 47.

¹² For example, in Washington state, “Fish-ins” asserted treaty rights and dramatized racial discrimination against American Indians.

important powers with respect to Indian nations. Congress has historically interpreted its constitutional powers over Indian affairs as plenary.¹³ Paradoxically, although Congress claims plenary power over tribes and their resources, it has also, at times, recognized Native sovereignty.¹⁴ The social and political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s created conditions in which key federal officials could support reform and self-determination. Born and raised in Indian Country and chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs during this poignant moment of militant protest made Abourezk—the Syrian Sioux—a sympathetic and strategic partner in the quest for legislative reform and self-determination.

Fallen Ancestors: Wounded Knee, 1890

On January 1, 1889, a Nevada Paiute named Wovoka (Jack Wilson) experienced a vision during a solar eclipse. In his vision, Wovoka found himself in the presence of God, looking down upon Indian people hunting and playing in the afterlife. God told Wovoka to return to his people and tell them to live in harmony with one another, to work hard, not drink or steal, and to make peace with White people.¹⁵ If they followed these directives and performed the Ghost Dance, they would find peace and reunite with the spirits of their ancestors in the afterlife. By the time Wovoka's revelation of the Ghost Dance reached the Oglala Lakota it took on a millennialist cast; the Oglalas believed that if they performed the Ghost Dance and lived rightly they would not only find peace on

¹³ Wilkins and Lomawaima, 106-108.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁵ Treuer, *Heartbeat*, 4.

earth, but all the White people would be washed from the earth and the world redeemed to an Edenic paradise.¹⁶

The federal government responded to these developments by banning the Ghost Dance and sending troops. Around December 20, 1890, Mineconjou Lakota Chief Spotted Elk (Big Foot) fled Standing Rock Reservation for Pine Ridge Reservation with 350 compatriots at the invitation of Chief Red Cloud, whom they believed could broker a peace with federal officials. On December 28, the U.S. Seventh Cavalry intercepted Spotted Elk's band at Wounded Knee Creek before dawn in the bitter Dakota cold. A deadly confrontation followed the army's attempt to disarm Spotted Elk's band. Ultimately, the U.S. soldiers opened fire with Hotchkiss guns and the brutal encounter left most of Spotted Elk's band lying dead in the late December snow; the number of casualties is uncertain, but has been estimated at between 150 and more than 300 dead.

The ruthlessness of the confrontation was described and commemorated by the survivors. American Horse testified that defenseless women and infants were killed even as they attempted to flee and touch the flag of truce.¹⁷ Charles A. Eastman, a Dakota physician and one of the first to visit Wounded Knee Creek wrote, “Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre...they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives.”¹⁸ By the mid-1890s, a group of survivors including Joseph Horn Cloud sought reparations from the federal government for the survivors and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ David W. Grua, “In Memory of the Chief Big Foot Massacre’: The Wounded Knee Survivors and the Politics of Memory,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 46 (Spring 2015), 34.

families of the victims. Congress appropriated compensation to Lakotas who claimed property losses as a result of Wounded Knee, but nothing was awarded to the survivors or to the families of the victims. Horn Cloud and other survivors explicitly used the term “massacre” to describe Wounded Knee. According to David W. Grua, the claimants “reinvented the English word *massacre*, which Whites commonly used to differentiate their ‘civilized’ mode of warfare from indiscriminate killings of noncombatants that ostensibly defined how ‘savages’ waged war.”¹⁹ In 1906, Nebraska newspaper editor Eli S. Rucker noted that the Lakota always referred to Wounded Knee as a massacre, or *Wichaskasotapi*, an engagement in which “all were wiped out.”²⁰ Horn Cloud and other survivors memorialized the Wounded Knee massacre with a three-day ceremony over Memorial weekend, during which they dedicated a six-foot tall four-sided obelisk at the victims’ mass grave. The memorial stood as a protest against the violence of American expansionism, and a challenge to popular narratives that summarily emerged about the meaning and significance of Wounded Knee.²¹

The Lakota interpretation of what had transpired at Wounded Knee stood in stark counterpoint to the army, War Department, and popular assessments of the encounter. Although U.S. Army officers disagreed about what exactly happened, the War Department upheld the Seventh Cavalry’s position that the confrontation was sparked by “‘treacherous’ and ‘fanatical’ Ghost Dancers who had attacked unsuspecting troops,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

thereby disavowing any responsibility for the deaths.”²² The War Department awarded twenty Medals of Honor to the Seventh Cavalry.²³ For White Americans, Wounded Knee came to symbolize the end of an era; as David Treuer explains, the massacre was seen “as the end not just of the Indians who had died but of ‘the Indian,’ period. There had been an Indian past, and overnight, there lay ahead only an American future.”²⁴ This long-held interpretation proved untrue.

The Second Generation: Senator James George Abourezk

James George Abourezk was born on February 24, 1931 in the family home in Wood, South Dakota. Charlie was sixty years of age when his youngest was born. Over the years, Charlie had transformed the family residence from a simple one-room cabin to a thirteen-room rambler.²⁵ Witnessing the hardships faced by the Sioux and the poor Whites who struggled for survival in and around Wood gave Abourezk a greater appreciation for that fact that he never remembered his own family being short on food or fuel.²⁶ In his memoir, he recounted the difficulties for those working and living in the harsh arid climates of the rural Great Plains, especially for hardscrabble farmers and Indians. He noted that for Indians, conditions were far worse. Abourezk remembered the staggering

²² *Ibid.*, 32.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Treuer, *Heartbeat*, 8.

²⁵ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* But Abourezk did not always have empathy for Rosebud’s Indian residents. During his formative years in Wood, disdain for Indians, and particularly for Indian alcoholics, was a unifying issue among local Whites. Abourezk shared their contempt, “believing it was permissible, even heroic, to ridicule the Indians.” His own racism was a personal blind-spot not visible to him until his college years.

poverty in which many local Rosebud Sioux lived. In contrast with the home he and his family occupied, Indian homes in the area were typically small log or tin shacks, or even canvas tents, which barely offered adequate shelter from the unremitting wind and cold of South Dakota winters. The difficult circumstances of their lives often drove local Indians to alcoholism, a phenomenon Abourezk later described as a symptom of the crushing poverty and “psychological defeatism that the white occupation imposed on them.”²⁷ In addition, anti-Indian sentiment was pervasive among Whites on and around the Rosebud.²⁸

Although his family situation was far better than other Rosebud residents, like his father before him, James Abourezk struggled financially in his early years, working a series of odd jobs before entering into the law and politics. At the age of seventeen, he joined the navy, serving in Japan and Korea between 1948 and 1952. Upon returning to South Dakota, he worked at a notorious local bar—the Bloody Bucket—in Wood. He also married his first wife, Mary Ann Houlton, upon his return, and the young couple had two children, Nikki and Charles, the latter named after his grandfather Charlie. To make ends meet, Abourezk did stints in various bars, sold cars, worked in the family business, sold wholesale groceries, managed powwow dance competitions, and finally entered the South Dakota School of Mines to start what he had hoped would be a more lucrative career in engineering. When the economy did not provide the kind of job security he had hoped for, Abourezk enrolled in the University of South Dakota School of Law.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

From a young age and throughout adulthood, Abourezk demonstrated a propensity for aiding the marginalized, particularly local Indians. In his memoir, Abourezk clearly viewed himself as a champion of the underdog. He recounted some important childhood moments that illustrate this dimension of his personal ethic, like encountering a blind coal miner pan-handling while visiting his sister in West Virginia, and defending a poor white farm boy against local bullies in Mission.²⁹ Abourezk's penchant for service continued in his career as a criminal lawyer in Rapid City, South Dakota, where he often defended Indian clients and the poor *pro bono*.³⁰ Following a spate of unexplained deaths in Fall River County and reports of what Abourezk termed "bread and water" punishment of Indian prisoners in the Hot Springs, South Dakota, jail, Abourezk commented that, "the victims have more often been Indians and the perpetrators non-Indians."³¹ In another incident, an Indian resident of Fall River County was beaten to death by a deputized civilian in the presence of law enforcement; in response, Abourezk railed against the county's failure to prosecute the perpetrator.³² Abourezk pressed the attorney general for an investigation and media coverage of these and other Fall River County crimes without success. Abourezk was also sensitive to politics and problems on the Rosebud, where he

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ In February 1969, he spoke alongside the executive director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) about improving Indian access to legal services. At the time, Abourezk was chairman of the Pennington County Bar Association's Legal Aid Committee. He spoke to the group about the pressing need for legal services among Indians and the poor, particularly as tenants at the mercy of "slum lords." A critical issue for Indians, according to Abourezk, was their "understandable mistrust" of White lawyers.

³¹ "Calls for Investigation of Actions Against Indians," *The Daily Republic*, Mitchell, South Dakota, 16 January 16, 1969.

³² "Abourezk Says Officials 'Minimize' Mistreatment," *Rapid City Journal*, January 18, 1969.

spent his childhood and adolescence. In 1970, he called for a congressional investigation of the handling of tribal funds after complaints surfaced about the embezzlement of money and property by the Rosebud's tribal chairman.³³

The same year, and in spite of his pro-Indian politics, Abourezk was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for the Second District of South Dakota—a majority Republican district.³⁴ Abourezk, a progressive Democrat, ran as an anti-war and pro-small farm candidate. In April 1970, Abourezk called the war in Vietnam “one of the most serious policy blunders in our history.”³⁵ While he decried President Nixon's foreign policy decisions with respect to Vietnam, he was not afraid to cross party lines in support of Nixon's Indian policy, which, in 1970 advocated for “self-determination without termination.” Nixon's call for self-determination represented a significant departure from over a century and a half of federal Indian policy.

Federal Indian Policy

The rise of militant Red Power in the late 1960s can be seen as the logical outcome of over a century of socially, economically, and politically devastating federal Indian policies. Before the formation of the United States, Indian tribes were recognized as sovereign, autonomous nations with inherent powers to organize governments, legislate and adjudicate, enforce laws, and determine tribal membership. The treaty-making

³³ Abourezk wrote a letter to Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), chair of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, saying, “I believe a senate investigation is badly needed to determine what laws might be needed to protect the rights of tribal members against embezzlement.” “Probe Asked On Handling Tribal Funds,” *The Daily Republic*, Mitchell, South Dakota, January 12, 1970.

³⁴ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 59.

³⁵ “Abourezk on Vietnam,” *Rapid City Journal*, April 5, 1970.

process acknowledged the sovereign status of Indian nations, which then held complete political power within their territories. Over time, however, the United States federal government began to assume powers of guardianship over Indian tribes, and removal, segregation, and assimilation guided federal Indian policy from the 1830s to the 1960s.³⁶

The early nineteenth century policy euphemistically termed “removal,” but more accurately understood as ethnic cleansing and genocide, was supported by Andrew Jackson’s administration, written by Congress, and adjudicated in the courts.³⁷ Cases arising from Removal helped to define the Federal-Indian relationship. In the 1831-1832 Cherokee cases, the Supreme Court defined Indian tribes as “domestic dependent nations’ whose citizens were ‘in a state of pupillage and subject to the guardianship protection of the federal government.’”³⁸ At the same time, and within the same court, Chief Justice John Marshall also stated that tribes were “distinct political communities, having territorial boundaries, within which their authority is exclusive.”³⁹ The term “trust

³⁶ Michael C. Walch, “Terminating the Indian Termination Policy,” *Stanford Law Review* 35 (July 1983), 1182. Such policies, according to Walch, “were intended to impel Indians and tribes to adopt the characteristics of non-Indian society and to reduce their political and economic independence.” Policies and decisions affecting the autonomy of Indigenous nations came not only from Congress, but through Executive action, the courts, and later, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

³⁷ The most infamous example of removal was the forced relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes from their native homelands in the Southeast to what is now the state of Oklahoma. These two critical cases defined the limits of tribal sovereignty vis a vis the federal government; in short, “Tribes are under the protection of the federal government and in this condition lack sufficient sovereignty to claim political independence; tribes possess, however, sufficient powers of sovereignty to shield themselves from any intrusion by the States and it is the federal government’s responsibility to ensure that this sovereignty is preserved.”

³⁸ David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System, Fourth Ed.* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 152-153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

responsibility” became a shorthand for the complex relationship between Indian nations and the United States federal government.

Beginning in the 1850s, the Indian Office (which in 1947 became the BIA) administered federal Indian policy directives aimed at assimilation. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun established the Indian Office in 1824 in an effort to centralize the government’s fractured approach to Indian policy and Federal-Indian relations. The Indian Office managed (or more precisely, mismanaged) the reservation system, and implemented the government’s mission to “civilize” American Indians. Abourezk would later remark that the central purpose of the BIA was simply to maintain itself. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant’s “Peace Policy” charged Christian missionaries with the project of transforming American Indians into Christian farmers and U.S. citizens (see Chapter Four).⁴⁰ In 1871, Congress enacted a provision that Indian tribes were no longer to be recognized as independent nations with whom the United States would negotiate

⁴⁰ The “civilization” and assimilation of Indians became the overriding mission of the BIA by the 1880s. According to Franke Wilmer, federal assimilation strategies were wide-ranging and included, “replacing the traditional communal economic base with a system of private property; intensified education, primarily through boarding schools; the regulation of every aspect of Indian social life, including marriage, dispute settlement, and religious practice; the granting of citizenship;...and finally allowing the Indian tribes to become self-governing by adopting constitutions ultimately subject of the approval of the U.S. government.” Reservations administered by the BIA and Christian missionaries became petri dishes for this “civilizing” mission. Such social experiments took a variety of forms, and as intended, devastated the traditional social and cultural fabric of Indian life and Indigenous land bases. The most infamous examples of these coercive assimilation policies were the Dawes Severalty Act or General Allotment Act of 1887 (see chapter 4) and the brutal separation of Native children from their families and cultures at Indian boarding schools. By 1934, when the Dawes Act was finally suspended, 118 of 213 reservations had been subject to allotment, resulting in Indigenous land loss on the order of ninety million acres—acreage roughly the size of the state of Montana. On Pine Ridge Reservation, for example, allotment devastated the development of thriving tribal livestock operations by subdividing lands into the fragmented checkerboard ownership patterns so observable on plat maps. See also Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

treaties. Previous treaties were not abrogated, but this move represented a serious blow to tribal sovereignty, and one that would resurface with the rise of Red Power a century later.⁴¹ This was closely followed by the 1887 Dawes Act, which decimated Indigenous land bases, leaving scores of allottees landless and impoverished.

The failure of a half-century of federal Indian policy was plain by the 1920s, resulting in several federal investigations into the socio-economic hardships facing American Indians. *The Problem of Indian Administration* (hereafter Meriam Report), a two-year investigation conducted by Lewis Meriam and staff at the Brookings Institution in response to the massive failures of the Dawes Act's allotment policy was a scathing indictment of the effects of federal policy on Indigenous peoples since the end of the Indian Wars.⁴² The conditions uncovered in the study included high mortality rates, poverty, devastating health conditions, inadequate education and housing, and displacement due to land loss.⁴³ The Meriam Report and other contemporaneous investigations led to policy changes that aimed to restore some measure of Indian self-governance, but the ultimate goal of assimilation remained.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 154.

⁴² Authorized in 1926 by Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work.

⁴³ Louis Meriam decried the ineffectiveness of forced assimilation saying that it “has resulted in much loss of land and an enormous increase in the details of administration without a compensating advance in the economic ability of the Indians.” Although Meriam critiqued previous policy, he and others continued to uphold the goal of assimilation for Indian peoples. Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 156.

⁴⁴ Other studies that laid the groundwork for the policy changes of the New Deal era included: Preston-Engle Report on Indian irrigation; “Law and Order on Indian Reservations of the Northwest;” and an investigation conducted by the Senate Indian Committee, which informed the senate committee on the government's and BIA's role in perpetuating the problem of Indian poverty. Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 157.

The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) or Indian New Deal attempted to remedy the staggering problems uncovered by the investigations of the 1920s. Spearheaded by Indian Affairs Commissioner John Collier, the IRA aimed to minimize the power and discretion of the Department of the Interior and BIA over Indian lives. The IRA ended the policy of allotments and initiated a host of programs designed to facilitate economic development and some measure of political autonomy, including reorganizing tribal governments.⁴⁵ The IRA produced mixed results, on the one hand creating and empowering tribal governments, and on the other imposing American political frameworks onto tribes rather than promoting Indigenous forms of governance.⁴⁶

By the 1950s, the pendulum of federal Indian policy swung dramatically yet again, although it still aimed at assimilation. Using a similar standard as the 1906 Burke Act, Termination policy proposed the cessation of federal recognition and benefits for “sufficiently assimilated” tribes deemed no longer in need of trusteeship.⁴⁷ Termination policy also entailed the relocation of American Indians from reservations to urban “relocation centers.” Like the Dawes Act and other assimilation policies, this coercive

⁴⁵ Although, under the IRA, tribes were authorized to adopt constitutions, amendments, bylaws, and incorporation charters, these were subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior.

⁴⁶ In addition, and as we will see clearly in the Wounded Knee occupation, intra-tribal conflicts could be exacerbated by the growing power of tribal governments created in the image of U.S. political institutions and empowered by the federal government. Numerous factors inspired this transformation including: the resignation of John Collier in 1945, the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946, which allowed Indians to sue the federal government for monetary compensation, and an attitude within both Congress and the BIA that the IRA inhibited the assimilation of American Indians. Walch, “Terminating the Indian Termination Policy,” 1185.

⁴⁷ House Concurrent Resolution 108 was passed in 1953, and declared that Indians should “be freed from all Federal supervision and control and from all disabilities and limitations specially applicable to Indians.”

and unsuccessful effort aimed to destroy tribal communalism.⁴⁸ But Indians living in urban relocation centers formed new communities that helped to sustain and revitalize their Native identities, and ushered in an era of protest that demanded the federal government and the American public attend to the pressing problems Indians faced on and off of reservations. Activism among urban Indians and the social and political milieu of the civil rights era shifted the tide of federal policy toward Indian self-determination by the early 1960s. By 1970, Richard M. Nixon called for Indian “self-determination without termination.”

Wounded Knee, 1973

Abourezk was sworn into the United States Senate in January 1973, a period of intense Red Power activism. Although American Indians had been organizing politically around the concept of “self-determination” since at least the early 1960s, in the period between 1969 and 1973 activism grew increasingly militant, paralleling the development of the Black Power movement. In November 1969, a group of Indian activists and their supporters occupied Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay, claiming it as Indian land

⁴⁸ Terminated tribes experienced land loss, became subject to state law and federal taxes, lost critical programs and services, and surrendered legal sovereignty. Its impact on terminated tribes and individuals was staggering, as Michael C. Walch explains, “Without their consent, the affected tribal governments, which had existed for centuries, lost most of their authority over tribal members and their recognition by the United States as sovereign entities. The terminated tribes also lost their state tax exemptions, the benefits they received from federal Indian programs, and extensive land holdings. Perhaps even greater concern to Indians involved was that termination ended their recognition as Indians. Their trust relationship with the United States ceased, and legally they became no different from any other citizen living in a particular state.” The results of termination were also devastating for Indian individuals and Indigenous land bases; reservation lands were sold, education levels declined, employment for relocated Indians became a challenge, and many lost their homes and became welfare recipients. It soon became clear that “although lofty ideals were used to urge their adoption, the acts more frequently resulted in the dispossession and impoverishment of the Indians they were meant to ‘free.’” Even more acutely felt was the loss of their tribal communities and identifications as Indians. See also Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 158.

under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. In 1972, the Trail of Broken Treaties ended with the violent occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in Washington, D.C. The Trail of Broken Treaties was organized and led by the American Indian Movement (AIM), a group formed in Minneapolis in 1968 to address the wide-ranging local and national problems of Indian education, poverty, police brutality, and cultural survival. For Indigenous peoples who had experienced the violent occupation and usurpation of their native homelands, protest in the form of land occupations was fitting. As the BIA occupation continued to garner headlines, Henry M. Jackson, chairman of the Senate Interior Committee, appointed Abourezk chairman of the Indian Affairs Subcommittee, a position which he had requested. Initially flattered by the appointment, Abourezk later quipped that “no one else wanted the job.”⁴⁹ But it was a timely appointment that Abourezk had been preparing for his entire life.

Just as Abourezk accepted his chairmanship of Indian Affairs in the Senate, militant Indian protest riveted his home state. During this period Indian activists and organizations made consistent calls to the federal government to address Indian problems on and off of reservations. In the fall of 1970 and the summer of 1971, sit-ins at Mount Rushmore dramatized Sioux grievances. As with the Alcatraz occupation, the protestors claimed ownership of the monument and surrounding territory of the Black Hills under the Fort Laramie Treaty, called for an end to racism toward Indians, and demanded a hearing by the Secretary of the Interior.⁵⁰ After the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan

⁴⁹ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 221-222.

⁵⁰ “Wounded Knee Press Kit,” November 1973, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, Folder 35.

disbanded following the BIA occupation in the fall of 1972, AIM activists regrouped, making their next stop South Dakota. AIM first joined local Indians in Rapid City to protest racism, poverty, and discrimination in housing and employment, and the treatment of Indian veterans.⁵¹ Local AIM leader Ron Petite called for federal hearings on the situation in Rapid City.

The convergence of activists and local Whites in and around Rapid City created a powder keg environment across the state. On January 21, two men—one Sioux and one White—got into an altercation outside of a bar in Buffalo Gap, near Rapid City. The encounter turned deadly when the White man, local business owner Darld Schmitz, stabbed the Sioux man, Wesley Bad Heart Bull. Schmitz was charged with second degree manslaughter, spent one night in jail, and was released on \$5,000 bail. In response, on February 6, caravans of more than two hundred Indian people converged on the city of Custer, South Dakota. Gene Heavy Runner, a 23-year-old Blackfeet and AIM leader in Missoula, Montana, called the killing of Bad Heart Bull “a national emergency for Indians.”⁵² Activists traveling to Custer from Missoula told the press that they were ready to “die for their cause.”⁵³ In the riot that ensued, buildings were burned, fights broke out between activists and police officers, and thirty Indians were arrested, including the victim’s mother, Sarah Bad Heart Bull. The Associated Press called the protest “an

⁵¹ Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 180.

⁵² “Montana AIM Says Group Going to Custer,” publication unknown, February 9, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Indian uprising.”⁵⁴ Like Ron Petite’s call for an investigation in Rapid City, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) appealed to President Nixon to send investigators to South Dakota, and NCAI executive director Charles E. Trimble also requested two congressional committee investigations to examine ““the problem of discrimination against Indian people’ by state and local police and judicial authorities.”⁵⁵

Abourezk and Lloyd Meeds (D-WA), chairmen of the Senate and House Indian Subcommittees, were asked to hold hearings in South Dakota and other Indian areas to discuss the issues. Abourezk responded to the developments in Custer from his office in Washington. In a series of phone calls, he arranged for meetings in Rapid City between AIM leaders and Custer County officials to quell the violence.⁵⁶ Abourezk also spoke with AIM leader Dennis Banks (Chippewa), the Custer County States Attorney Hobart Gates, and Rapid City attorney Ramon Roubidoux (Brulé Sioux), who represented the arrested members of AIM.

Shortly thereafter, on February 26, the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) met to discuss their grievances with Pine Ridge’s tribal government. The group called on AIM for assistance since previous meetings had failed to produce results. The organization already had ties to AIM, in particular through Russell Means (Oglala Sioux).⁵⁷ OSCRO’s concerns were multilayered, with local and pan-Indian dimensions. A

⁵⁴ “National Indian Group Demands Investigation,” publication unknown, February 9, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “Meeting called for AIM Leaders and Officials,” publication unknown, February 9, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

⁵⁷ Smith and Warrior, 195.

primary point of conflict on Pine Ridge was between the elected tribal government and traditionalists and their allies (some of whom were members of local AIM chapters). OSCRO and the traditionalists opposed the rule of elected tribal chairman Dick Wilson, whom they accused of corruption and authoritarianism. Wilson had allegedly favored residents of the town of Pine Ridge, and mixed-blood Oglalas over their full-blood counterparts; he used his position to provide jobs and services to his family members and friends and shut his opponents out of the political process. Perhaps most egregiously, Wilson virtually suspended tribal government and organized a private police force, the “GOON” squad (Guardians of the Oglala Nation), to suppress political dissent. Wilson’s chairmanship exacerbated divisions already existing on Pine Ridge, and his opponents attempted to impeach the chairman without success. Anticipating a confrontation and AIM’s threats to move into Pine Ridge, the federal government set up a command post manned by sixty-five members of the Special Operations Group of the U.S. Marshal Service.⁵⁸

The evening of February 26, five Oglala chiefs and representatives from each of Pine Ridge’s districts met with AIM members including Russell Means and Dennis Banks (Ojibway). After conferring, Oglala medicine man Frank Fool’s Crow instructed the activists in Lakota, “take your brothers from the American Indian Movement and go to Wounded Knee and make your stand there.”⁵⁹ The chiefs’ direction to take Wounded Knee was both tactical and profound given of the history and significance of the place. When the Oglala activists and their AIM allies moved into Wounded Knee on February

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

27, 1973, they demonstrated that the Indian era and Indian resistance had never truly passed. They were the descendants of cultural and political traditions they were bound and determined to continue.

When the caravan of protestors reached Wounded Knee, a village of about one hundred residents, they took over the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and a trading post owned by the Clive and Agnes (Ojibway) Gildersleeve. Although Banks instructed protestors not to touch anything in the store, it was summarily ransacked, and virtually stripped of its contents including guns, ammunition, food, clothing, and artifacts displayed in glass cases.⁶⁰ The Gildersleeves and a Jesuit priest were taken hostage and removed to a nearby residence. Dennis Banks remembered the scene and the displays that, in part, likely animated the looting:

Items that had been taken from our slaughtered people were displayed in glass cases. They had large photographs on the walls, almost poster-sized, showing our frozen dead, their bodies grotesquely twisted as death overtook them...They showed soldiers grinning among the heaps of slain victims, of bodies stacked like firewood, ready to be dumped in a common ditch.⁶¹

In response, federal marshals, the FBI, BIA police, and Wilson's goon squad cordoned off the besieged village. Meanwhile, protestors delivered a set of demands to a Department of Justice operative stationed at the village with the message: "Communicate this to whoever is in charge. We are operating under the Provisions of the 1868 [Fort

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶¹ Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibway Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 168.

Laramie] Treaty. This is an act of war initiated by the United States. We are only demanding our country...”⁶²

The protestors’ demands reflected both the internecine political struggle at Pine Ridge and the goals of AIM and the Red Power movement generally. The three demands of the OSCRO and AIM occupiers called for meetings with three United States senators: William Fullbright, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Edward Kennedy, chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedures; and James Abourezk, chair of the Senate Sub-Committee on Indian Affairs. These men held the power to investigate and intervene in the policies of the reviled BIA and to reinstate the treaty-making process unilaterally renounced by the U.S. House of Representatives in 1871, after nearly a century of tribal recognition as individual nations with diplomatic relations with the United States. Charged with convening the Indian Affairs Sub-Committee “for a complete investigation of all Sioux Reservations in South Dakota,” Abourezk’s interests in the matter straddled his state and federal responsibilities. Recognition as sovereign nations, renewal of treaty making powers, and respect for existing treaties were at the heart of AIM’s political platform.

Upon learning of the occupation and hostage-taking at Wounded Knee, Abourezk arbitrated from his office in Washington. Using the Pine Ridge telephone book, he called the residence of Wilbur Riegert, the first number listed for Wounded Knee. Coincidentally, Riegert’s home was being used as the headquarters for occupiers, and Means answered the call. Abourezk and Means had been acquainted from years before, and he told the senator that they were holding eleven hostages who would not be released

⁶² Smith and Warrior, 203.

until he, Fullbright, Kennedy, and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger heard their demands. According to Abourezk, the conversation was cordial until the press arrived on the scene, at which time Means “began shouting demands and conditions into the telephone.”⁶³ Abourezk ended the call telling Means he would work on putting a negotiating team together. Besides Abourezk, none of the other officials were willing to go to South Dakota. Abourezk ultimately convinced South Dakota Senator George McGovern and members of Fullbright’s and Kennedy’s staffs to join him at the negotiating table.⁶⁴ Means agreed to release the hostages once the team arrived at Wounded Knee.

On March 1, Abourezk and McGovern flew into Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City and arrived at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation by FBI helicopter. The Department of Justice requested the FBI notify the senators that they “can in no way guarantee their safety” and Special Agent in Charge Joseph Trimbach apprised Abourezk “of the danger if they pursued their present plans.”⁶⁵ McGovern told reporters on the scene that he and Abourezk, “came here with the one purpose—to bring about the release of the hostages—

⁶³ The press played a critical role in this and other civil rights protests. On the one hand, the occupiers relied on the press to generate public attention and sympathy for their cause. As with Black civil rights efforts, publicity and public sympathy forced the federal government to act. On the other hand, as Dennis Banks pointed out, the press protected protestors from state violence; he wrote, “We were thankful for their [media] attention. As long as they were there, we could not be attacked.” Activist Carter Camp told reporters, “if it were not for you people [the press], this government would have slaughtered us as it did in 1890.” Smith and Warrior, 203.

⁶⁴ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 223.

⁶⁵ “Memorandum to Mr. Gebhardt Re: Disorders by American Indians,” March 12, 1973, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 37.

not to grant demands or deal with problems.”⁶⁶ Abourezk prioritized the safety of the hostages but also the grievances that brought about the occupation in the first place; he commented,

I personally am willing to go anywhere to discuss problems any group of Indians may have, and to do everything in my power to remedy the legitimate problems facing Indian people in my state and across the nation.⁶⁷

Abourezk and McGovern stationed themselves at the Crazy Horse Café at Pine Ridge, waiting for SAC Trimbach to return with word from Means. Hours passed and tired of waiting, Abourezk told McGovern in his typical audacious style, “I know Russ Means. Let’s you and I go directly to Wounded Knee and talk to him.”⁶⁸ The senators and John Terronez, community relations representative for the Justice Department, tied a white cloth to a tree branch and hung it out the window as they drove through the perimeter established by the U.S. Marshal Service, BIA police, and Wilson’s contingent. Driving through what operatives on both sides termed the “demilitarized zone,” Abourezk described the fear and uncertainty in the car that day, saying, we felt we “could very well be [entering] the valley of the shadow of death.” The men crossed the Indians’ perimeter staring down the barrels of shotguns, rifles, and automatic weapons. When they arrived at the village, Abourezk and McGovern soon discovered that the hostage situation was not exactly as it had seemed; they learned that all of the “hostages” were residents of

⁶⁶ “Senators Fly to Wounded Knee Area, Open Talks,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1973.

⁶⁷ “Wounded Knee is a Battlefield Again,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1973.

⁶⁸ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 226.

Wounded Knee and had no intention of leaving their homes, although many evacuated as the standoff wore on.⁶⁹

Means and Banks set up two meetings in which the senators could hear out the concerns of the Oglalas who had sanctioned the occupation. The second meeting was arranged on a plateau in the DMZ, in between Indian and federal lines. In part, Means used the meeting with the senators for his own political showboating; at the first meeting, surrounded by the press, Means accused Abourezk of lying to him. Stunned, the senator challenged the activist to name one time he had lied. Means replied dramatically, “many times,” and then whispered to Abourezk, ““Don’t take what I said seriously.”⁷⁰ Means needed to portray a contentious dynamic for the press in which the Indians and the federal government were squarely at odds, when in reality, the lines between them were not so easily drawn. During the meeting, Abourezk told Means he would enter into negotiations if the protestors agreed to lay down their weapons and meet on common ground outside of the besieged village. Means refused, telling Abourezk that if the hostages were released he and his compatriots would most certainly be killed.⁷¹ Abourezk assured Means this would not be the case. Unsurprisingly, Abourezk later wrote that the meeting could hardly be described as a roaring success.

The second meeting was more substantive. Later that evening, the senators returned to Wounded Knee, to the home of Wilbur Riegert, where they remained until midnight

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷¹ “Memorandum to Mr. Gebhardt Re: Disorders by American Indians,” March 12, 1973, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 37.

listening to Oglalas who contested Wilson's administration. To Abourezk, their claims were legitimate.⁷² From his perspective, the traditionalists and their allies believed their tribal government had been appropriated by mixed-blood Indians using an election process anathema to indigenous political traditions. In response, traditionalists rejected the election process by refusing to participate; as Abourezk saw the matter, "they were...paying the price for standing on principle, because their wishes were being ignored by the younger oligarchy of mixed-blooded Indians who dominated the election process...[and] Their grievances had never been addressed by either the tribal leadership or the Bureau of Indian Affairs."⁷³ Finally, and perhaps most symbolically for the negotiation, the senators met briefly with ninety-two-year-old Ben Irving, a survivor of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre.⁷⁴ Although Irving was only a child and remembered little firsthand, he was often told of it by his contemporaries. Abourezk had been acquainted with Irving because he had been politically active on the reservation for many years, including serving as the Democratic central committeeman for Pine Ridge. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that tensions seemed to ease toward the end of the three-hour meeting. But the air calm evaporated quickly with the outbreak of violence. The meeting ended on a "jarring note" when AIM leaders were informed that one of their homes in Pine Ridge was firebombed; according to Abourezk, the incident "stirred them up."⁷⁵

⁷² Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 226.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁴ "Senators Talk with Indian Alive at Time of Wounded Knee Battle" *Argus Leader*, March 4, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

⁷⁵ "Indians Hold on at Wounded Knee as Night Talks Fail," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1973.

When the meeting closed at midnight, the negotiating parties had very different assessments of its outcome. The senators expressed cautious optimism and felt informed about the range of issues at Pine Ridge and among the AIM leaders. During the late-night meeting Abourezk gave AIM, OSCRO, and other Oglalas present, “unequivocal assurance that his committee on Indian affairs would hold extensive hearings in all parts of the country where Indian people will have a chance to testify.”⁷⁶ Congressional investigations were a primary objective of the occupation according to AIM’s list of demands. Abourezk said that the meeting of the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs would probably commence within a few weeks at Pine Ridge. After their meeting, at nearly midnight on March 2, Abourezk told Means, “You know, Russ, this thing is going to have to end at some point. Why don’t you end it now before someone gets hurt?”⁷⁷ Means responded in the affirmative, and requested that the FBI outline all charges and bail to give to AIM’s lawyers so they could be ready with their defense.

In his memoir, Abourezk remembered leaving the meeting feeling they had made progress, and that they had assurances that the “hostages” could come and go freely. AIM members had a different perspective. Banks later wrote that “Abourezk was sympathetic [to Indian grievances], but McGovern in his fashionable polyester suit was less so. They achieved nothing.”⁷⁸ However AIM leaders interpreted the outcome of the meetings with Abourezk and McGovern, the presence of the senators at Wounded Knee absorbed the

⁷⁶ “Firebombing Tempers Optimism at Wounded Knee,” *Rapid City Journal*, March 2, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

⁷⁷ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 227.

⁷⁸ Banks, *Ojibway Warrior*, 172.

press and nation deeper in the confrontation, and the negotiations set the stage for the investigations and legislation that followed. Neither the confrontation nor the violence ended with the senators' departure from the scene early that morning.

As the occupation wore on, Abourezk continued to respond to the escalating situation at Wounded Knee. On March 26, 1973, the Senate Interior Committee met secretly to discuss the protracted crisis. Partisan blaming on the origins of the crisis dominated much of the meeting. For his part, Abourezk attempted to bring the conversation back to the matter at hand, saying, "[t]he genesis is in what we refuse to deal with for the last 100 years so far as the Indian problem itself is concerned. I think that's where our attention should be directed."⁷⁹ Three days after the Interior Committee meeting, on March 29, Abourezk returned to South Dakota to arrange negotiations between the occupiers and federal officials, but talks were stymied by what Abourezk described as an internal leadership struggle within the movement.⁸⁰

It was not until May 5, seventy-one days after AIM and Oglala protestors occupied Wounded Knee, that a settlement was reached with federal officials. After Abourezk's unsuccessful trip to South Dakota on March 29, a preliminary agreement was reached on April 5. According to an AIM press release, residents of Pine Ridge Reservation and leaders of AIM signed a six-point agreement with White House representatives which provided for a re-examination of U.S. obligations under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, an investigation into the administration of the BIA and tribal government, and an inquiry

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

⁸⁰ "New Talks," *Rapid City Journal*, March 29, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder 36.

into civil rights and criminal violations on the reservation. The following day, Abourezk issued a press release praising the accord as the result of patience and restraint on the part of Indian protestors and federal officials who handled the negotiations. He reconfirmed his commitment to a congressional investigation at Pine Ridge into the underlying causes of the confrontation, noting the importance of local hearings to allow all segments of Pine Ridge to voice their concerns. Once again, Abourezk placed responsibility for the confrontation at Wounded Knee on the federal government:

Both Wounded Knee and the Trail of Broken Treaties stand out as a stark reminder of the Federal Government's failure to fulfill its historical, legal and moral commitments to the Indian people... The net effect of this treatment has been to relegate Indians to a life of degradation and the most abject poverty ever experienced by any population group in this nation. It comes as no surprise to me that the Indian people should express their outrage over this period of prolonged neglect... Wounded Knee, therefore, is in part a composite plea of the Indian people to the Nation that these historical injustices and wrongs must be rectified.⁸¹

According to an AIM press release, the agreement of April 5 was immediately violated when federal officials insisted the occupiers first surrender their arms and submit to arrest, which in their view violated the terms of the agreement.⁸² The deal fell apart over the point of disarmament; ironically, the 1890 massacre had been precipitated by U.S.

⁸¹ "Statement by James Abourezk," April 6, 1973, press release, Abourezk Collection, folder news releases, May 1973.

⁸² "Wounded Knee Press Kit," November 1973, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, Folder 35.

Army efforts to disarm Spotted Elk's band on Wounded Knee Creek. The Oglala and AIM protesters held their ground until a final agreement was reached on May 5.

Congressional Investigations

Although his own efforts to broker a peace between Indigenous protestors and the federal government failed at Wounded Knee, Abourezk fulfilled, and I would argue exceeded, AIM's mandate to open congressional investigations into the grievances that spurred the protest. Abourezk initiated two important investigations in the wake of Wounded Knee. The first, held at Pine Ridge Reservation following the conflict, set out to air the local concerns of Oglala Sioux within and outside of tribal government. The second, sponsored by Abourezk and codified in Senate Joint Resolution 133 and Public Law 93-580 called for the establishment of a two-year study of the Federal-Indian relationship, conditions of life for American Indians on and off of reservations, and for policy recommendations to ameliorate those problems. SJ 133 launched the American Indian Policy Review Commission (AIPRC), the first investigation of its kind since the Meriam Report was published in 1928, and the first congressional investigation to be largely undertaken by American Indians themselves. For Abourezk, the concept of self-determination—Indian leadership of policymaking—guided the investigations and the legislation that followed.

An internal memo from Abourezk's office outlined the senator's leanings, goals, and strategy for Indian affairs following Wounded Knee. Abourezk's primary objective was the enactment of major legislation reforming Federal-Indian relations by the end of

1974.⁸³ Toward that end, the Wounded Knee field hearings at Pine Ridge would be “structured and sold” as preliminary to broader national hearings and investigations examining the underlying problems involved in the occupation—problems which he viewed as national in scope. Reform of the dysfunctional BIA and passage of a study-funding resolution were on his agenda for 1973 and 1974. The memo also shows Abourezk’s position for the direction of Federal-Indian policy. Abourezk viewed the “Nixon Package,” promoted by the Administration and largely supported by Republicans and conservative Indian groups, only to be “token improvement bills” and not “the answer to Indian problems.” Some of these bills included, among others: the Trust Counsel Authority Bill, Indian Financing Act, and Self-Determination Bill (regarding contracting).⁸⁴ But the document clearly shows that Abourezk would support such conservative efforts to garner wide support for reform, while also addressing what he, AIM, and the traditionalists clearly saw as the only path forward—fundamental reform of the Federal-Indian relationship; in short, respecting the foundations of the U.S. government’s trust responsibility to American Indians—to honor treaties, respect tribal sovereignty, promote economic prosperity, and tribal self-governance. “Indian militants and traditionalists,” the memo reads, “are pushing hard for major policy changes now in the Federal-Indian relationship. Abourezk has no difficulty in promoting this philosophy.” The problem, according to the document, was for Abourezk to “become solely identified with this faction,” thus losing broad tribal and congressional support.

⁸³ “Overview of Goals and Strategy for Reaching Goals in Indian Area,” June 16, 1973, internal memorandum, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “Wounded Knee Hearings,” 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Ultimately, Abourezk's strategy entailed "tossing legislative cookies" to Indian conservatives and Republicans in Congress while pushing ahead with a more comprehensive reform agenda.⁸⁵

On June 15, 1973, the *Rapid City Journal* announced that Wounded Knee hearings would begin the following day at Pine Ridge Reservation. According to Abourezk, the intent of the hearings was not to rehash the events of the occupation, but to discuss the reform of tribal government, the BIA, and the Federal-Indian relationship. He again remarked that the confrontation at Wounded Knee was merely a symptom of underlying problems faced by Indian people across the nation, and that the failure of Federal-Indian policy had been largely responsible for those problems. In his opening remarks at the hearing, Abourezk also cited the failures of both Congress and bureaucrats saying, "The Congress has been far too neglectful of this problem for the last 100 years. Occasionally a spark of ingenuity appears on the Indian affairs scene and too often it's forgotten in the face of formidable bureaucracy that seems to maintain the status quo, seems to want to maintain indeterminately."⁸⁶

Pine Ridge leaders, AIM, and Pine Ridge community members were slated to testify in the hearings, including: Tribal Chief Wilson; Superintendent Stanley Lyman of the Pine Ridge Agency; BIA Area Director Wyman Babby; and AIM leaders Russell Means, Clyde Bellecourt, Ted Means, and Pedro Bissonette. The following day, hearings continued at the high school gymnasium at Kyle, South Dakota, so that traditional Oglala

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁶ Kirke Kickingbird, "The American Indian Policy Review Commission: A Prospect for Future Change in Federal Indian Policy," *American Indian Law Review* 3 (1975), 245.

Sioux members could testify, and time was also set aside for public testimony before Indian Affairs Subcommittee members.⁸⁷ Abourezk stated that his “effort as chairman will be to ask the Indian people how they view their problems and how they think solutions can be reached, and then to try to write these solutions into law.”⁸⁸ From his point of view, “there have been too many white man’s attempts to tell the Indian what he needs.”⁸⁹

In his efforts to get funding for Indian staffers on the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, Abourezk and Interior Committee Chief Counsel Bill Van Ness came up with the idea of putting together a special commission to study Indian problems in order to hire more staff. Van Ness believed that a special commission would be the best way to appropriate money to hire Indian staffers. The two-year study of Indian policy that emerged from this effort was the AIPRC, and their mandate was to study Indian problems and make recommendations to Congress and the Administration.⁹⁰

Abourezk introduced Senate Joint Resolution 133 on July 16, 1973, precisely one month after the Wounded Knee hearings at Pine Ridge. The concept of congressional investigations has a long history, and this was not the first application of congress’ investigatory powers in Indian Affairs, which were first asserted by the House of Representatives in 1792.⁹¹ SJR 133 established the American Indian Policy Review

⁸⁷ “Abourezk Indian Hearings Scheduled this Weekend,” *Rapid City Journal*, June 15, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “June 1-30, 1973.”

⁸⁸ “Wounded Knee Rehash Not Goal of Hearings,” *Rapid City Journal*, June 16, 1973, press clipping, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “June -30, 1973.”

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 231-232.

⁹¹ Kickingbird, “American Indian Policy Review Commission,” 244.

Commission in order to “undertake a comprehensive review of the historical and legal developments underlying the Indians’ unique relationship with the Federal Government to support the formulation of more positive and effective national Indian policies and programs.”⁹² This historic investigation of Federal-Indian policy was the first of its kind ordered by the legislative branch.

The agenda and composition of the committee sparked hope for significant changes in Federal-Indian policy. In 1975, Abourezk remarked that the AIPRC would find out “what went wrong with Federal-Indian policy what should be done to fix it.”⁹³ What was, of course, singular about the AIPRC was the fact that Indians would be appointed to the commission. The AIPRC was composed of eleven members: six members of Congress—three from the House and three from the Senate—and five Indian commissioners. Abourezk was named chairman of the Commission, and he appointed the Indian commissioners to represent varied segments of Indian society including federally recognized tribes, unrecognized tribes, and urban Indians.⁹⁴ Eleven task forces were created to investigate such wide-ranging issues as the Federal-Indian relationship, treaty review, tribal government, administration, jurisdiction, health, education, and substance abuse, among others. Abourezk’s intent for the commission was that a majority of task force personnel were “to be of Indian descent,” and he instructed staff director Ernie

⁹² *Ibid.*, 245.

⁹³ “Abourezk Selected Chairman of the American Indian Policy Review Commission,” March 6, 1975, press release, Abourezk Collection, folder “Native Americans #3.”

⁹⁴ The commissioners were Ada Deer (Menominee), Jake Whitecrow (Quapaw-Seneca), John Borbridge (Tlingit), Adolph Dial (Lumbee), and finally, Louis Bruce (Mohawk-Sioux), representing urban Indians.

Stevenson (Oneida) and staff counsel Kirke Kickingbird (Kiowa) to hire Indian staff members “whenever possible.” Ultimately, according to Abourezk, of more than one-hundred-fifty staff members, only one—Max Richtman—was a non-Indian.⁹⁵ Abourezk’s objective for the commission was not simply to investigate problems and propose solutions, but also, he later wrote, bringing Indians “to do the work of rooting out Indian policy successes and failures was [designed] to build cadres of Indian leadership. Indians had rarely had an opportunity of this kind, and I wanted to make certain that they could take full advantage of it.”⁹⁶ In his recent work, *Pathways to Indigenous Sovereignty*, attorney Alan R. Parker (Chippewa Cree), who also served on the AIPRC task force on tribal government and as special counsel for the Select Committee on Indian Affairs called Abourezk’s idea of appointing Indian people to be in charge of the Commission’s work “revolutionary and effective.”⁹⁷ From the perspective of the AIPRC, the commission’s mandate was far broader than the Meriam/Brookings study nearly fifty years earlier. Rather than examining narrowly the effects of a single failed policy—allotment—the AIPRC was tasked with examining the gamut of Indian policies and contemporary conditions.⁹⁸ Noted intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) expressed enthusiasm for the resolution in a Congressional hearing remarking, “In short, in one gigantic leap, Senator Abourezk put Congress into the forefront of the Indian

⁹⁵ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 232.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Alan R. Parker worked as a Civil Rights Task Force for the Solicitor’s Office of the Department of the Interior. He also served on the AIPRC task force on Tribal Government, and as special counsel for the Temporary Select Committee on Indian Affairs.

⁹⁸ Alan R. Parker, *Pathways to Indigenous Sovereignty: A Chronicle of Federal Policy Developments* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 19.

movement by proposing a vehicle more daring and creative than even the Indians had conceived.”⁹⁹ On May 17, 1977, Abourezk presented the AIPRC’s final 604-page report, containing no less than 206 policy recommendations, to Senator Edward Kennedy, who was then presiding officer on the floor of the Senate.¹⁰⁰ The opening statement of the final report read, “It has been the fortune of this commission to listen attentively to the voice of the Indian rather than the Indian expert. The findings and recommendations which appear in this report are founded on that Indian voice.”¹⁰¹

From the start, the AIPRC report’s emphasis on Indian sovereignty created challenges for its implementation and stoked racial antagonisms. Lloyd Meeds, chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Indian Affairs and vice chair of the commission, balked at the report’s “one-sided advocacy” saying it champions “an unwarranted extension of the concept of tribal sovereignty.”¹⁰² Meeds clearly believed that the report’s emphasis on sovereignty would necessarily infringe on the rights of non-Indians—i.e. the rights of White Americans. Abourezk defended the report’s foundation on the “time-tested doctrines” of tribal sovereignty and trust status.¹⁰³ Abourezk also roundly repudiated Meeds’ portrayal of the interests of Indians and non-Indians as being necessarily oppositional. In his response, Abourezk wrote,

⁹⁹ Kickingbird, “The American Indian Policy Review Commission,” 245.

¹⁰⁰ Parker, *Pathways to Indigenous Sovereignty*, 17.

¹⁰¹ George Pierre Castile, *Taking Charge: Native American Self-determination and Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 34.

¹⁰² “Abourezk Comments on Report of American Indian Policy Review Commission,” March 16, 1977, press release, Abourezk Collection, folder “Native American, AIPRC.”

¹⁰³ “Separate Views of Senator James Abourezk,” May 16, 1977, Abourezk Collection, folder “Views on Dissent in AIPRC.”

Even if a particular recommendation could be described as ‘pro-Indian,’ I would never think that such a recommendation automatically becomes ‘anti-white’...In an effort such as this report, dependent on cooperation and mutual respect, arguments which tend to rekindle the flames of racial mistrust strike me as exceedingly irresponsible...to characterize these recommendations as ‘favoring Indians’ raises the specter of racial antagonism and majoritarian domination which I had hoped was buried forever in a shameful past.¹⁰⁴

After the report was filed, Meeds resigned as chair of the House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. The report not only spurred debate within the Committee, but among Indians as well. These and other challenges stifled the report’s reception and efficacy. Abourezk later wrote that the AIPRC’s recommendations for the Administration were largely ignored.”¹⁰⁵

American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA)

Abourezk also amplified Indian voices in the realm of religious freedom. On September 5, 1975, Abourezk nominated Frank Fool’s Crow, who two years before had instructed AIM to make their stand on the hallowed ground of Wounded Knee, to offer the convening prayer in the Senate. It was the first time in U.S. history that an American Indian religious leader had done so. Later in life, Abourezk sardonically remarked that he had hoped Fool’s Crow’s prayer “could create a...miracle for the United States, but as hard as he tried, and as we now know, nothing happened.”¹⁰⁶ Federal efforts to wipe out

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¹⁰⁵ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 217.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

the Ghost Dance religion—the directive that culminated in the Wounded Knee Massacre—is but one example of the longstanding suppression of American Indian religious practice. Although the First Amendment protects religious freedom and prohibits Congress from either promoting or restricting the free exercise of faith, this foundational right had rarely, if ever, protected American Indian religious practice from the whims of policy makers. Had federal officials extended the First Amendment’s religious protections to American Indians, Spotted Elk’s band of Ghost Dance adherents would have been spared.

Writing from the perspective of nearly two decades, Abourezk recognized few legislative accomplishments from his tenure as Chairman of Indian Affairs, in spite of the fact that he was the primary congressional sponsor for forty bills related to American Indian rights in areas including tribal recognition, land claims, jurisdiction, education, and child welfare, among others. The Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) was one he sponsored which amounted to a policy statement that Native religious freedoms would be protected, this would ostensibly include the protection of sacred spaces, practices, and objects.¹⁰⁷ Like S. 1147, AIRFA was born from the efforts of Indian activists. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the bill’s passage, Alan Parker noted that “there are no wise people in Congress or in the White House who dream up these laws and say, ‘Why, this is good for Native people. Let’s adopt this law.’”¹⁰⁸ As Chief Counsel for the Temporary

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 235. Abourezk also counted the Indian Child Welfare Act as the other “worthwhile bill” of his tenure as chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs in the Senate.

¹⁰⁸ Walter Echo-Hawk, Lenny Foster, and Alan Parker, “Issues in the Implementation of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act: Panel Discussion,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 19, Colonization/Decolonization I (Autumn 2004), 165.

Select Committee on Indian Affairs, Parker noted that Abourezk was an “unusual individual” not only for being a liberal senator from South Dakota, but because he “really had a sense of wanting to do something for Native people.”¹⁰⁹ Author Walter Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), wrote that AIRFA “is a historic landmark statute. For the first time Congress finally acknowledged...that the First Amendment has never worked for the Native American peoples in the United States.”¹¹⁰ But, in its final form, AIRFA was a general policy statement that, in his words, “although it was a Congressional Resolution that [had] no force of law,” gave Indians “a platform from which to protest the trampling of their religious freedoms by the government.” In spite of this legislative accomplishment, the bill suffered from the lack of an enforcement mechanism. Alan Parker noted that a right-to-sue clause was included in the language of the original bill, but was removed under intense pressure from timber, mining, and agribusiness interests.¹¹¹

Reckoning: S. 1147

S. 1147 was perhaps the most symbolic and least well-known legislative effort precipitated by the Wounded Knee occupation. On February 5, 1976, Abourezk opened a public hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee on S. 1147, a bill “to award compensation to descendants of survivors of the Army’s massacre” of Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee Creek in 1890. That the bill’s text described Wounded Knee as a “massacre” was significant. The proposed legislation called for the payment of \$3,000 (about \$13,500 today) to be paid to the descendants of every Indian man, woman, or child

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

killed or injured at Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890. Abourezk noted that S. 1147 was not the first effort to award compensation to the victims of Wounded Knee; Representative Francis Case and Congressman E. Y. Berry—a driving force behind Termination—also of South Dakota, had advanced similar legislation in 1938 and 1954 respectively.¹¹²

Although they facilitated the bills, these legislators were not the impetus behind the push for reparations—the Wounded Knee survivors and their descendants were.

Wounded Knee survivor Joseph Horn Cloud, who lost both of his parents and several siblings in the massacre, first pushed for reparations as early as the mid-1890s. Yearly commemorations at the Wounded Knee monument erected by Horn Cloud evoked the government's failure to provide reparations. In 1933, at one of the gatherings, those who had lived to tell their stories formed the Wounded Knee Survivors Association, which made it their mission to preserve their memories and to keep their case for reparations before the federal government. Original members of the Survivor's Association included Horn Cloud and Dewey Beard (Mineconjou Lakota), the last survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn.¹¹³

Witnesses slated to testify in the hearings included historian Robert Utley of the National Park Service, historian Al Josephy of the American Heritage Foundation, representatives of the Interior Department, and most importantly, four representatives of the Wounded Knee Survivor's Association from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Dee

¹¹² "Opening Statement: Senator James Abourezk" February 5, 1976, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder "Pine Ridge."

¹¹³ Mark Hirsch, "Wounded Knee: Healing the Wounds of the Past," NMAI

Brown, author of the 1970 best seller *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, served as a special consultant for the hearing.¹¹⁴

The U.S. Army also testified, vehemently opposing the bill; they disputed the charge that Wounded Knee was, in fact, a massacre. In a letter to Senator James Eastland, Judicial Committee Chairman, the Army stated that it would be highly inappropriate to award relief on the basis of a “massacre”...and such a finding by the Congress would be unfair to the officers and men who cannot defend themselves against such a serious charge.¹¹⁵

In his opening statement, Abourezk noted that in their effort to ensure the failure of the bill, the U.S. Army submitted a lengthy rebuttal in which they described “the events in 1890 not as a massacre, but as a restrained compassionate response to an Indian provocation.” In evaluating this argument, Abourezk proclaimed that, “revisionism and cover-up is as unworthy of today’s Army as massacre was in 1890.”¹¹⁶

Abourezk’s S. 1147 hearing gave the descendants—members of the Wounded Knee Survivor’s Association—an opportunity to provide their own narratives of the massacre for the record. The testimonies of the survivors and their descendants describe the profound trauma and staggering losses they sustained. Talbert Looking Elk depicted the scene as his mother had told it to him. She witnessed the murder of a pregnant woman who was slow to rise to her feet, so the soldiers pushed her over and then shot her.

¹¹⁴ “Wounded Knee Hearings, Judiciary,” undated, press release, Abourezk Collection, folder “Pine Ridge.”

¹¹⁵ “Army Denied a Wounded Knee Massacre” *New York Times*, December 30, 1975.

¹¹⁶ “Opening Statement: Senator James Abourezk” February 5, 1976, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “Pine Ridge.”

Looking Elk testified that after the mass firing stopped, soldiers checked the men's lifeless bodies; those found alive were shot and killed on the spot. When the soldiers came to Looking Elk's father, he closed his eyes, so they would not shoot him again. Looking Elk lost his grandfather, grandmother, and brother at Wounded Knee, and both of his parents were badly wounded.

Victoria Friday Scares was also told of the events at Wounded Knee by her mother, Julia Spider Back Bone. Spider Back Bone escaped the onslaught when she, her aunt, uncle, and a woman with a baby ran from the soldiers' fire. Before they reached the creek bank, the baby was shot right out of its mother's arms. Her aunt and uncle, running close behind, were also shot down in cold blood. Julia Spider Back Bone escaped by running along the bank of Wounded Knee Creek until she found cover where waterfalls had made a hole covered in hanging brush. She and her grandmother waited until the next night and started back home, walking for seven days and nights in heavy snowfall. Julia Spider Back Bone lost her mother, father, and two brothers at Wounded Knee.

Moses and Steven He Crow, sons of Wounded Knee survivor Jackson He Crow, shared their late father's memories of Wounded Knee with Abourezk and the Judiciary Committee. Jackson He Crow was seven years old on December 29, 1890. He, his mother, and sister ran west, uphill to escape the gunfire. He heard mothers and babies screaming and shrieking; he watched soldiers take babies, throw them into the air, and shoot them. He witnessed women raped and then shot. Jackson He Crow lost his father and two sisters that day; another sister died of her wounds soon after.

John White Lance told his father, Daniel White Lance's story of survival and loss. Daniel White Lance was twenty-two years old. He was badly wounded by soldiers who,

his son noted, had “provoked the incident.” Daniel White Lance was shot four times in the leg and head; three bullets punctured his left thigh and left calf, and his right heel was shot off. A bullet grazed his head, leaving a permanent part in his hair. His son remembered his father’s suffering, as the wounds never healed properly. Daniel White Lance eventually died of those unhealed wounds. His mother and two younger brothers—Herman and William Horn Cloud—were killed and buried in the mass grave marked by the Wounded Knee monument. From the perspective of the survivors and their descendants, the massacre spoke powerfully of the victims’ dehumanization and to the utter disregard for Indian life demonstrated by the Seventh Cavalry and the government that rewarded the soldiers for such conduct.

Monetary compensation notwithstanding, which Abourezk called a mere “token payment,” S. 1147’s acknowledgment of government wrongdoing and recognition that the confrontation was, in fact, a “massacre” had the potential to make affective and psychological amends for the descendants. In a meeting with Robert Utley, Al Josephy, and Dee Brown, Abourezk asked the historians “What effect might the admission of the U.S. (that it had erred) make on the Indians?” Al Josephy replied, “It would show a commitment to our treating them as equals.”¹¹⁷ Reverend Simon Looking Elk, a representative of the Wounded Knee Survivor’s Association, presented a poignant testimony that spoke to the longstanding psychological harm brought about by the massacre and its denial by the U.S. government. Reverend Looking Elk wrote,

¹¹⁷ “Witnesses,” undated, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “Wounded Knee Survivors.”

The dictionary defines the word ‘massacre’ as ‘cruel and indiscriminate slaughter of human beings; butchery.’ A mile or two from the scene, women and children were found shot. They were left on the scene like animals...The Wounded Knee Survivors Association worked for a long time to bring this bill 1147 before you...I am grateful to all those who helped, especially Senator Abourezk. Yet there were times when I asked myself questions. What is an Indian? Is he worth anything? What is the price of a human being? Is there anybody who truly sees the Wounded Knee incident as a Massacre? I am proud to be an Indian. My 6th grade son came home from school mad, he said the teacher said, ‘Indians are drunks’ in class. People are worth a lot to me, My family mean something to me. There’s no doubt in my mind that the Wounded Knee incident was a massacre.¹¹⁸

Recognition and reparations might have affirmed the value of Indian lives by claiming responsibility for a single yet singular episode in the long and dark history of United States colonialism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, S. 1147 never made it out of the Judiciary Committee.

White Allyship

Disillusioned after a single term in the Senate, Abourezk refused to seek re-election in 1978. He found that senators spent more of their time campaigning for reelection than running the government, and that floor debates rarely, if ever, changed a vote. He remarked that “While most ordinary Americans were at home eating dinner with their

¹¹⁸ “Rev. Simon Looking Elk Testimony,” undated, Abourezk Collection, Wounded Knee Series, folder “Wounded Knee Survivors: Master Copies-Written Testimonies.”

families, I was eating the skin on the inside of my cheeks at the utter folly of it all.”¹¹⁹ On the upside, he also wrote, “the U.S. Senate is...the one place in the world that allows a poor boy to live as though he were a millionaire.”¹²⁰ Poor as a boy might be, White male positionality certainly offered a foothold for the steep ascent to the Senate.

Abourezk’s social location was rooted in his father’s history of immigration and his racial designation as White by law. Charlie Abourezk’s legal ability to immigrate, naturalize, and claim land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries laid the foundations for his upward mobility and for the mobility of his descendants. Hard work, ingenuity, and luck were also part of that equation. Following the seventy-one-day occupation of Wounded Knee, Abourezk self-consciously used his position of privilege to advance the cause of American Indian sovereignty and self-determination. Abourezk wrote that “whatever power one has as a senator can be used either for oneself or for others, a fact that required me to decide early on whether to do something on behalf of the unorganized and powerless—the Indians, consumers, Palestinians, the poor—or to avoid the controversial position of the advocate.”¹²¹ As an ally and proponent of self-determination, Abourezk did not seek to design policy for Indian peoples, but rather, to amplify Indian voices, transforming their agenda into legislative reality. As the AIRPC, AIRFA, and S. 1147 clearly demonstrate, those efforts were not fully realized. In November 1978, the *American Indian Journal* of the Institute for the Development of Indian Law paid a final tribute to Abourezk for his dedication to American Indian issues,

¹¹⁹ Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 3.

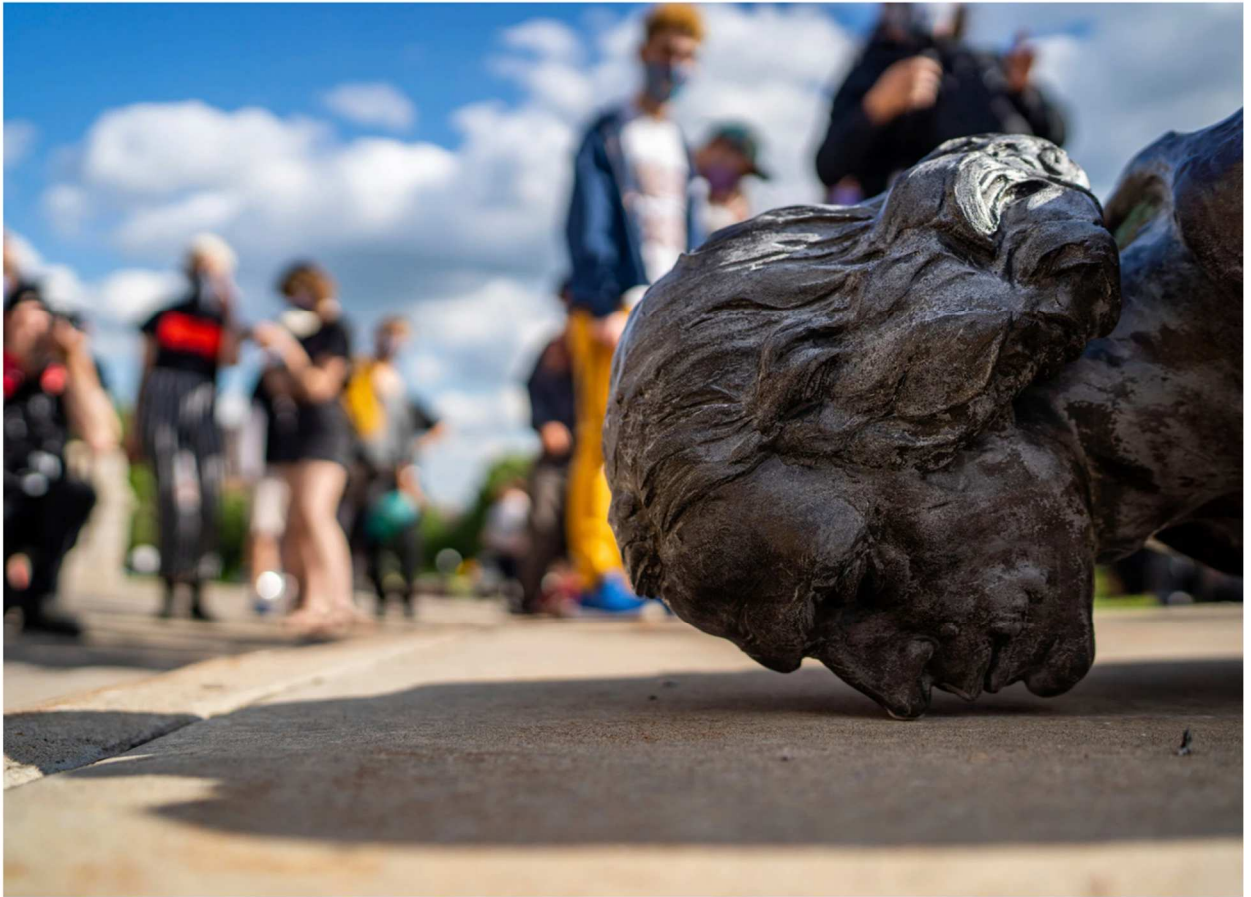
¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

they wrote, “His advocacy in the U.S. Senate on behalf of American Indians was deeply appreciated and will be greatly missed when he leaves the Senate in January of 1979.”¹²² It was not simply the privilege of his positionality that inspired his advocacy, but also the politics of place. The son of a Syrian homesteader, peddler, and merchant on Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, James George Abourezk’s activism on behalf of American Indians garnered him the moniker the “Syrian Sioux.”

¹²² “A Final Tribute to Senator Abourezk,” *American Indian Journal* 4 (November 1978), 37.

CONCLUSION



Evan Frost/Minnesota Public Radio, via Associated Press

Figure 18 Toppled Statue of Christopher Columbus, St. Paul, Minnesota, “How Statues are Falling Around the World,” *The New York Times*, June 24, 2020.

Many say that we are living in a moment of reckoning—reckoning with our history as a nation, reckoning with racism, with White supremacy, with our colonial past and present. The use of the term “reckoning” emerged from the massive wave of protests that followed the brutal killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, on May 25, 2020. Floyd’s murder sparked the largest wave of protests in United States history; according to polls, somewhere between 15 and 26 million

Americans participated.¹ During and after these protests, activists toppled statues memorializing Confederate generals including Robert E. Lee, J. E. B. Stuart, and Stonewall Jackson. Symbols of colonialism also fell under the weight of the moment; in St. Paul, Miami and elsewhere, activists tore down and defaced statues of Christopher Columbus. Such acts are a means by which some Americans are confronting our history of slavery and colonialism, the poisoned seeds of systemic racism in the United States. One wishes these symbolic deeds could truly achieve *a reckoning*—a final settling of accounts. But destroying and defacing monuments is part of a *reckoning with*—taking account of—the most difficult and consequential aspects our nation’s fraught history. The statues are gone, but we will always live with their ghosts.

In the spirit of the moment, I opened this dissertation with a favorite passage of many historians. In “The White Man’s Guilt,” James Baldwin writes

White man, hear me! History, as no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is, and formed one’s point of view. In great pain and terror because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to re-create oneself

¹ Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui and Jugal K. Patel, “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2020.

according to a principle more humane and more liberating: one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history.²

Ebony commissioned the piece for a special edition of the magazine called “The White Problem in America,” in August of 1965. Baldwin wrote “The White Man’s Guilt” during another moment of reckoning, a moment many would argue was the apogee of the twentieth-century Black freedom struggle. Baldwin’s confrontational tone, demanding, “White man, hear me!” speaks to the urgency and emerging radicalism of *his* moment: the year of Selma, the Watts Riots, and the Voting Rights Act. While he is confrontational, Baldwin’s message is ultimately redemptive. It is perhaps unfortunate that this poignant statement was published in *Ebony* because probably very few White people actually read it in 1965.

Baldwin’s words speak to the primary subject of this dissertation—confronting the history race in America, particularly what it means to be a White American, which in some ways, I am. Standing on the shoulders of giants, I have attempted to understand some measure of Arab Americans’ White privilege, which includes my own. Of course, Arab American racialization is complex, so I have also illustrated, in different times and places, Arab American not quite Whiteness as well. In doing so, I have considered Arab American positionality in relation to other racial and ethnic groups in the richly diverse spaces of the nineteenth and twentieth-century American West. In addition, “The Other Settlers” reckons with the history of colonialism in the United States, exploring ways in which Arabs have participated at critical moments including conquest, homesteading, and

² James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” *Ebony*, August 1965.

the making of federal Indian policy. At the heart of this work, I have considered these questions: How do Arabs fit into American immigration narratives? What does it mean to be a settler? In what ways have Arab Americans experienced White privilege? How has racial in-betweenness hindered but also helped Arab Americans? How have Arab Americans understood our own racial positionality? What does it mean to be an ally in struggles against systemic racism and marginalization?

In Part One, “Shapeshifters,” I chronicled two episodes of ethno-racial transformation in the American Southwest. Both chapters speak to the theme of Arab American racial in-betweenness and transformation. Chapter One, “Between Arab and Black,” examines Arab American, African American, and American Indian ethnic group memories of the sixteenth century Moroccan slave Esteban. As I show, both Arab Americans and African Americans have claimed Esteban and his narrative of “first contact” as their own, in efforts toward inclusion and belonging. For Indigenous people, however, debates about Esteban’s race are less important, for them, he is seen first and foremost as a harbinger of conquest. Thus, Esteban has served as a mirror for individuals telling his story, including my own.

Chapter Two, “Beasts of Burden,” continued the theme of ethno-racial transformation or “shape shifting,” by examining the life and multiple identities of Hadji Ali. In the 1850s, the U.S. Army recruited Hadji Ali in Ottoman Smyrna to assist the military with founding a camel cavalry to crush Indian dominance in the desert Southwest. Jefferson Davis hoped that expelling the region’s Indigenous peoples would help to extend the empire of slavery into a region recently annexed by the United States. Like Esteban, Hi Jolly was a racialized worker laboring on the fringes of empire in the

service of slavery and colonialism. Hi Jolly was a threshold figure in other ways as well. Hi Jolly was a chameleon-like individual who made a number of opportunistic transformations throughout the course of his life—Christian, Muslim, Turkish, Greek, Mexican, *and Arab*—a unique survival strategy available to racially ambiguous individuals.

Part Two, “Syrian Immigrants and Settlers in the Asian Exclusion Era” recounts stories of Arab immigration and naturalization through examinations of U.S. immigration law and land policy. In Chapter Three, “Trails and Fences,” I explore Syrian racial positioning with regard to U.S. immigration restrictions during the era of Asian exclusion. Although Syrian immigrants were not barred on the basis of race and nationality, as were Chinese and later Japanese workers, in practice, Syrian immigrants were excluded because they were assumed to be contract laborers, the poor, and carriers of “loathsome and contagious diseases.” These categories of exclusion were racialized, and came to be closely associated with Syrians. In response to the restrictions, migration networks that linked the old country to Europe and the Americas channeled Syrians to the United States through Mexico. As the reports of immigration inspectors show, thousands of Syrians made clandestine crossings of the U.S.-Mexico border in the early twentieth century. The inspectors’ investigations also show how the journey to America—not race—created the conditions for exclusion, including: labor contracts, disease, and poverty. By the nineteen teens, however, the U.S. government came to see Syrians in closer proximity to Southern Europeans than to other Asian groups, which protected Syrians from total exclusion.

Chapter Four, “Whiteness as Property,” perhaps best exemplifies the aim of this dissertation, exploring connections among immigration, race, and colonialism, and the privilege associated with legal Whiteness for Syrian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this chapter, I show how race, citizenship, and property rights were intertwined in a story of Syrian homesteaders in North Dakota. For Syrian immigrants in the era of Asian exclusion, access to homesteads hinged on securing a White racial identity, as homesteading was closed to immigrants “ineligible for citizenship.” When Syrian Whiteness and racial eligibility for citizenship were threatened in the racial prerequisite cases, so too were Syrian homesteaders’ access to so-called “free land.” In 1915, Syrians’ White racial status was affirmed in *Dow v. United States*, securing their access to the homestead privilege, and to the lands of dispossessed Indians. As I argue, access to White racial citizenship transformed Syrian immigrants into American settlers.

Part Three, called “Reckoning,” shows how one man, James George Abourezk, became an ally to the movement for Indian self-determination following the armed confrontation between American Indian Movement activists and the federal government at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973. Abourezk was born and raised on Rosebud Sioux Reservation in south-central South Dakota, the son of a Syrian immigrant homesteader. Raised in a community where the ethnic majority were Sioux, he witnessed daily the challenges Indian peoples faced. He went on to become a lawyer, a U.S representative for South Dakota’s second district, and a U.S. senator. The confrontation at Wounded Knee, in which he served as a hostage negotiator, catalyzed his commitment to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. In his single term in the U.S. Senate,

Abourezk sponsored over forty pieces of legislation inspired by the efforts and priorities of Native activists, including the landmark American Indian Policy Review Commission and the Indian Religious Freedom Act. Lesser known, but no less important, were Abourezk's efforts to raise the voices of the living survivors and descendants of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, bringing their case for reparations to the Senate floor. Abourezk's allyship was born from his origins as the son of a South Dakota settler. As an ally, Abourezk used his privilege to amplify the voices of American Indians in his home state and across the nation.

It is my hope that this dissertation is, in its own way, an act of allyship, an answer to Baldwin's call for White people to bear the burdens of our shared and troubled history. If we fail, those leaden monuments will surely drag us all down with them.

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