



Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience (M.E.R.I. Special Studies)

By Alixa Naff

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A unique study in American immigration and assimilation history that also provides a special view of one of the smaller ethnic groups in American society.

Naff focuses on the pre-World War I pioneering generation of Arabic-speaking immigrants, the generation that set the patterns for settlement and assimilation. Unlike many immigrants who were drawn to the United States by dreams of industrial jobs or to escape religious or economic persecution, most of these artisans and owners of small, disconnected plots of land came to America to engage in the enterprise of peddling. Most planned to stay two or three years and return to their homelands.

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Editorial Review

Review

"I found *Becoming American* spellbinding and could not put it down until I finished it."—**Farah Gilanshah**, *MESA Bulletin*

"With scholarly devotion, Alixa Naff reconstructs this sparsely documented history [of Arab immigrants from the Syrian and Lebanese segments of the Ottoman Empire] mainly from interviews with second-generation Arabs who provide vivid if somewhat nostalgic recollections of their parents' heroic application of the Levantine work ethic to the not-dissimilar American way of life."—**John D. Yohannan**, *New York Times*

"The best single volume about... perhaps 150,000 immigrants largely from what is now Lebanon who came before World War II. Although many Americans . . . write as if the words *Arab* and *Muslim* were synonymous, some 85 percent of these people were Christians."—**Roger Daniels**, *Journal of the West*

"With special emphasis on the period 1880 to 1920, and on the role of pack peddling on the economic mobility and acculturation of the pioneer Arab Americans, Alixa Naff's work is among the most comprehensive and interesting studies available on the history of Arab ethnicity in the U.S."—**Helen Hatab Samhan**, *Middle East Journal*

"The importance of women's economic roles as peddlers and later as shopkeepers is emphasized. . . [Becoming American] is a significant contribution to the literature on ethnic enterprise and on immigrant women."—**Maxine S. Sellers**, *American Historical Review*

"A masterly piece of writing, which is structured firmly on research findings and original personal interviews, and which glows with intuitive understanding and scholarly interpretation and conclusions. It constitutes a highly significant contribution to the history of the Syrian-Lebanese community in the United States."—**Dr. Afif Tannous**

About the Author

Alix Naff, author of *The Arab Americans*, an illustrated history for young adults, is donor and curator of the Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection at the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution.

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