

## Abstract

Title of Thesis: RACE ACROSS BORDERS: RACE AND  
TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE FIRST SYRIAN-AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY, 1890-1930

Zeinab Emad Abraham, Master of Arts, 2013

Thesis Directed By: Professor, Madeline Zilfi  
Department of History

This research explores the transnational nature of the citizenship campaign amongst the first Syrian Americans, by analyzing the communication between Syrians in the United States with Syrians in the Middle East, primarily Jurji Zaydan, a Middle-Eastern anthropologist and literary figure. The goal is to demonstrate that while Syrian Americans negotiated their racial identity in the United States in order to attain the right to naturalize, they did so within a transnational framework. Placing the Syrian citizenship struggle in a larger context brings to light many issues regarding national and racial identity in both the United States and the Middle East during the turn of the twentieth century.

RACE ACROSS BORDERS: RACE AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE FIRST  
SYRIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1890-1930

by

Zeinab Emad Abraham

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Arts  
2013

Advisory Committee:

Professor, Madeline Zilfi, Chair  
Professor, David Freund  
Professor, Peter Wien

© Copyright by  
Zeinab Emad Abraham  
2013

*For Mahmud, Emad, and Iman*

## Table of Contents

List of Images.....	iv
Introduction.....	1-12
Chapter 1: Historical Contextualization.....	13-25
Chapter 2: Social History.....	26-33
Chapter 3: Transnational Rhetoric.....	34-54
Chapter 4: Racial Science.....	55-75
Chapter 5: Race Across Border.....	76-101
Conclusion.....	102-106
Bibliography.....	107-109

## List of Images

Figure 1: Race Tree in “Asl al-insan”.....	67
Figure 2: Yusuf Karam, Syro-Lebanese Maronite.....	94
Figure 3: Mustafa Kamil, Muslim-Egyptian.....	95
Figure 4: Two Boys from Yemen.....	95

## Introduction

In 2011, the Arab American Institute (AAI), a non-profit organization dedicated to the political and civil empowerment of Arab Americans, launched a campaign to save “Little Syria,” one of the first Arab-American neighborhoods. The physical destruction of the community, which is located in lower Manhattan along Washington Street, was a result of building the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and The World Trade Center. Supported by reporters from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, the AAI is fighting to preserve the three buildings that are left of what was once the “mother colony” of the first Syrian Americans.<sup>1</sup> Campaign leaders are working to maintain the history of the first Syrian immigrants to the United States and have had backing from Arab Americans from various national backgrounds, because of the perception of “Little Syria” as representative of the history of all Arabs in the United States.

The history of Syrians in the United States encompasses the history of all Arab Americans due to the fact that Syrians were the first Arabs to immigrate to the United States in large numbers during the late nineteenth century. There are no immigration records or historical cues to indicate the presence of Arabic-speaking peoples from other parts of the world during this time, and for that reason, much of the historical scholarship on Arabs in the United States begins with a discussion of the first Syrian Americans. Historian Adele Younis was the

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the campaign to save Washington Street, see: [savewashingtonstreet.org](http://savewashingtonstreet.org) and [aaiusa.org](http://aaiusa.org). Journalists David D. Dunlap and Jennifer Weiss wrote pieces on Little Syria and the campaign. See: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/little-syria-now-tiny-syria-finds-new-advocates/> and <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324103504578376602575224418.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>.

first to inquire into the lives of the early immigrants. In her pioneering study, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking Peoples to the United States* (1961), Younis highlighted the “middle-class” status of the early immigrants and their ability to assimilate.<sup>2</sup> She argued that unlike other immigrant groups, namely the Italians, Syrians preferred entrepreneurship or peddling to factory work.<sup>3</sup> Her primary sources range from the Syrian-American press to interviews with the actual immigrants. Building on the information provided by Younis’ research, historian Alixa Naff also studied these immigrants extensively. In *Becoming American*, Naff utilized the Syrian-American press, interviews with first- and second-generation immigrants, and other primary sources to paint a demographic and statistical picture of the lives of the early immigrants.<sup>4</sup> Naff also focused on the sociocultural experiences of the first immigrants, particularly their role as “pack-peddlers,” a profession that she argued led to their rapid assimilation in the United States. Her assertion is problematic in that it assumes that a large majority of the first immigrants turned immediately to this trade. Indeed, there is evidence that many Syrians initially engaged in peddling for their source of income, and peddling explains their dispersal across the United States. However,

---

<sup>2</sup> “The coming of the Arabic-Speaking Peoples to the United States” (Thesis/Dissertation, Boston University, 1961). Younis expanded on her study and published a full-length text: *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking Peoples to the United States* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> There is an array of literature on the labor and social conditions of various immigrant populations during the turn of the twentieth century. See: Jerry Mangione, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992); Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrants Mobility in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). See: Hasia Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) for information on the labor conditions of Irish female immigrants during the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (USA: Southern University, 1985).



evidence suggests some took on other professions, particularly entrepreneurial endeavors such as shop keeping.

Another issue that arises from Naff's conclusion is the claim that Syrian immigrants relinquished all ties to their native land and culture. Historian Sarah Gualtieri demonstrated how the early immigrants did not fully assimilate and abandon their connection with their homeland. For that reason, their fellow Americans did not entirely accept them. Gualtieri showed that after Syrians settled in the United States, their racial status was "in between" Arab and white. Even after American courts declared them white by law, Syrian immigrants ran into obstacles to their complete inclusion in the white race. This is shown by an analysis of the 1929 lynching of Nola Romey, a Syrian immigrant who lived in Lake City, Florida.<sup>5</sup> Even though the newspapers and government officials covering the story described Romey as a "white man," the fact that he was lynched during a time when lynching was a form of violence directed only towards African Americans suggests that the identity of Syrians in the United States (at least those living in the South) was not completely codified as white.

Building on the social experiences of the immigrants outlined by Naff, Gualtieri placed the early Syrian Americans in a transnational context by exploring the ways in which they positioned themselves within the racial categories made available to them in the United States, while remaining in communication with their compatriots in other parts of the world. Gualtieri situated the Syrian-American struggle for racial inclusion at the heart of her

---

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4 in *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2009).

study, but also drew attention to the racial classification of Syrians that occurred in Brazil, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century. It was after reading Gualtieri's book, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, that the idea for this study developed. This study builds on Gualtieri's basic premise—that Syrian immigrants did not completely assimilate and forego their identification with their homeland—yet differs by incorporating an analysis of the development of racial science in the Middle East, especially as it was popularized by the Syrian-Christian intellectual Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914). The goal is to demonstrate the movement of intellectual thought across national borders and to suggest that Syrian immigrants did not learn about race solely from their experiences in the United States. When Syrian Americans in the early twentieth century negotiated their racial identity, they did so within an international framework. Those Syrian immigrants who embarked on a journey to the United States left their families and homeland, but remained attached to their culture. Studying the ways in which Syrian immigrants consulted and exchanged ideas about race from their homeland brings a different perspective to their struggle to become racially accepted in the United States.

In most instances, one's identity is not chosen, but imposed; this is especially true with regards to race. The Syrian naturalization campaign brings a different perspective to this phenomenon because it is an instance in American history where an immigrant group arrived with no conceptualization of race, at least not in the sense of the color-bound and racial categories of the Atlantic

world, but in the span of approximately twenty years, succeeded in placing themselves in the most legally and socially privileged racial category in use in the United States. Whiteness was forced on the consciousness of the first Syrian Americans because it meant access to privileges they otherwise could not afford. However, their ability to organize themselves in the pursuit of racial inclusion is remarkable and worthy of historical inquiry.

The perceived need for Syrians to become racially accepted brings attention to other categories of identity. When Syrians first arrived in the United States, immigration officials labeled them as Turks because they came from Greater Syria (today's Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine/Israel), at the time part of the Ottoman Empire. In many of the early Syrian-American newspapers, there are articles that speak to an Ottoman identity. It is hard to know exactly when and how the immigrants began viewing themselves as Syrians, but it is known that during their naturalization campaign, they identified as such and used that identity as part of their argument for racial inclusion into the Caucasian race.

### Primary Sources

The primary sources used to support this research include Syrian-American newspapers (in English script), Arabic-script newspapers, books written in the Middle East and the United States by Syrians, and various naturalization cases that occurred in state district courts across the United States.<sup>6</sup> The naturalization cases used in this study are drawn from previous research conducted on the history of whiteness in the United States by legal

---

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of one *Dow v United States* (1915). The cases discussed in this study occurred at the state level.

historian Haney Lopez. The naturalization cases, or the prerequisite cases as described by Lopez, were at the center of racial debates in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Through these cases, Syrian immigrants, along with other immigrant groups, contributed to the creation of a racial standard that would be inherited by future generations. Lopez used these cases to corroborate the claim that historically race has been a legal construct. This current study expands on the prerequisite cases to identify the salient arguments that Syrian petitioners employed to obtain naturalization.<sup>8</sup> Questions about race were central to the naturalization discussion during this time in American history, as immigrants had to prove their Caucasian racial status in order to become American citizens.

Along with the prerequisite cases, Arabic script newspapers/journals were used in this research, including *al-Hilal* (The Crescent) and *Al-Muqtataf* (The Extract).<sup>9</sup> Based in Cairo, *al-Hilal* was edited and written by Jurji Zaydan. Charting Zaydan's articles in *al-Hilal* provides information on the development of his racial ideology. *Al-Muqtataf* is a valuable source because of its discussion on the origin of man, which contributes to the contextualization of Zaydan's racial theories. Although Zaydan expressed his ideas on race in various *al-Hilal* articles, it is in his text, *Tabaqat al-Umam* (The Classes of Nations), published in

---

<sup>7</sup> Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>8</sup> The Syrian naturalization cases can be found online at [www.westlaw.com](http://www.westlaw.com). For example, In re Najour can be found at [http://campus.westlaw.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/find/default.wl?cite=174+F.+735&rs=WLV13.04&vr=2.0&rp=%2ffind%2fdefault.wl&spa=003372414-2000&fn=\\_top&mt=CampusLaw&sv=Full](http://campus.westlaw.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/find/default.wl?cite=174+F.+735&rs=WLV13.04&vr=2.0&rp=%2ffind%2fdefault.wl&spa=003372414-2000&fn=_top&mt=CampusLaw&sv=Full).

<sup>9</sup> Issues of both *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf* can be found at the Library of Congress.

1912, that Zaydan provided a concrete hierarchy for the various human races and outlined his racial ideology.

With regards to newspapers in the United States, *The Syrian World* is a major source of information on the lives of Syrian Americans during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The newspaper, founded in New York in 1926 by Salloum Mokarzel, a Syrian-Christian immigrant, was dedicated to second-generation Syrian Americans. Although the newspaper only lasted for six years, it offers insight into the issues that perplexed, troubled, and excited the larger Syrian-American community during the interwar period.<sup>10</sup> Many subscribers wrote to the publication from various regions of the United States, which indicates that its readership extended beyond New York.

Kalil Bishara's book, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, is another primary source used in this study.<sup>11</sup> Bishara, a Syrian-Christian immigrant in the United States, wrote his text amid the Syrian citizenship campaign. The English version illustrates the arguments Syrian immigrants made to prove their Caucasian racial status and thus their right to naturalize. *The Syrians in America*, written in 1924 by Philip Hitti, a Syrian American, is another valuable primary source.<sup>12</sup> Hitti published this book after Syrians had become legally accepted as Caucasians and were approved for naturalization. His work provides demographic and statistical information along with a perspective on the lives of the immigrants after the success of their naturalization campaign.

---

<sup>10</sup> Copies of *The Syrian World* can be found at the Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup> Kalil Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* (New York: Al-Hoda Publishing House, 1914).

<sup>12</sup> Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924).

Along with print sources, an oral interview was also conducted with Barbara Bonahoom-Davenport, a third-generation Syrian American.<sup>13</sup> Barbara's father was the son of two Syrian immigrants who came to the United States during the late nineteenth century. This interview provides a first-hand account of the experiences of the first Syrian immigrants. While Barbara's narrative cannot speak for all Syrian Americans, it supports the claim that naturalization was important to many Syrians who settled in the United States during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Recounting the history of the Banahoom family also sheds light on the lived experiences of the first Syrian Americans.

### Egypt's Role

Although Syrians and their homeland are the primary topics of this narrative, it is important to acknowledge the role that Egyptian politics played in influencing Jurji Zaydan, who would, in turn, affect the racial ideas of Syrians in the United States. Zaydan published both *al-Hilal* and *Tabaqat al-Umam* during his time as an immigrant in Egypt. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Egypt underwent many changes in its political, social, and cultural infrastructure, while under British colonization. Previous studies on Egypt's political and social climate have drawn attention to the discourse on race that developed as a result of this colonization. Historian Eve Troutt-Powell illustrates how Western ideas about race influenced the relationship between Egypt and Sudan. Just as the British stereotyped and engaged in racist attitudes towards

---

<sup>13</sup> Barbara's maiden name is Bonahoom, after she married she changed her name to Barbara Bonahoom-Davenport. She believed her family name originated from the Arabic name Abu-Na'um. She was interviewed on April 24, 2013 at the age of 85.

Egyptians, Trout-Powell argues that the Egyptians did not “suffer in silence,”<sup>14</sup> but rather projected those same beliefs onto the Sudanese.

Egypt’s relationship with Sudan must have contributed to some of Zaydan’s views on race, or at the very least, to his interest in racial categorization. Although Zaydan does not employ the modern Arabic word for race/racism, in some of his *al-Hilal* articles, he used the terms *alwan* (colors) and *asnaf* (types) to designate what is now understood as modern race. Considering that he based his research on *The World’s Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions*, a text delineating a global racial hierarchy published in 1908 by Augustus Henry Keane, it is evident that Zaydan published *Tabaqat al-Umam* with modern, that is to say, Western, concepts of race in mind. It is conceivable that to a certain extent, Zaydan framed his racial hierarchy in reaction against Great Britain’s success in subjugating the Egyptians, which resulted in their feeling of inferiority. By placing the majority of the Middle East, including Egyptians, in the same racial category as Europeans, the ideas expressed in *Tabaqat al-Umam* could have been an attempt to claim equality with the British. As this study argues, Zaydan had multiple reasons for publishing his text (as will be shown in Chapter 5), and raising the status of Arab nations could have been one. What is most important is that he outlined a global hierarchy according to race, not according to nationality, and hence it is probable that he perceived his book as a treatise on race, not on nation-states.

---

<sup>14</sup> Eve Trout-Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of Sudan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003), 10.

It is undeniable that the racism towards the Sudanese by Egyptians differed from racism towards blacks in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, Egyptian men could marry Sudanese women. In the United States, however, a white American male who married a black woman would have been charged with miscegenation.<sup>15</sup> What is important to note is that race was a construct in both countries and had many political and social implications.

### The Republic of Letters

Many articles that Zaydan published in *al-Hilal* are used in this study, but some of the most important sources are letters written to *al-Hilal* by readers from all over the world. A focus is placed on two letters to the editor from Syrians living in the United States, because they are evidence of communication between Zaydan and Syrian Americans. This transnational interaction through *al-Hilal* is representative of the republic of letters that existed amongst Syrian émigrés at the turn of the twentieth century. It may be asked whether two letters written to Zaydan indicate the engagement of all Syrian Americans with Zaydan's racial theories. It is challenging to know for certain how many Syrians read *al-Hilal* and how many turned to Zaydan for information on race. However, what is known is that some Syrian Americans sought his assistance during their campaign for citizenship and that this campaign engaged a large proportion of the greater Syrian-American community.<sup>16</sup> It is plausible that many immigrants preferred to

---

<sup>15</sup> See: Troutt-Powell's account of the Bedouin slave dealer Muhammad Shaghlib in the introduction of *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of Sudan*.

<sup>16</sup> Gualtieri discussed the initiative taken by the Syrian Society for National Defense (SSND) to gather financial contributions from fellow Syrians to support George Dow, one of the primary



stay “off the radar” and not actively participate in the naturalization campaign in order to avoid confrontation with fellow Americans or the United States government. The right to naturalize must have been on the mind of any Syrian immigrant who planned on settling in the country. It is therefore imaginable that a threat to naturalization preoccupied many Syrian immigrants.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the historical backdrop for Syrian immigration to the United States and the situation once the immigrants arrived in their new host country. Chapter 2 explores the demographic and social history of the first Syrian Americans. Chapter 3 focuses on the contribution of different nationalist movements in the Middle East to the ideologies presented by Syrian Americans during their campaign for American citizenship in the early twentieth century. Chapter 4 examines the transmission of Western biological racism to the Middle East through the lens of Jurji Zaydan. Charles Darwin and Western scientific theory inspired Zaydan’s anthropological principles, a fact that is made evident in his journal and in *Tabaqat al-Umam*. Chapter 5 directly connects the Arab world and the United States, which modern society deems as two separate entities, through the study of Syrian Americans and their campaign for citizenship.

The Syrian campaign for citizenship did not go unnoticed by Jurji Zaydan, as Syrian immigrants in the United States wrote to him about their struggles.

Chapter 5 concentrates on an inquiry sent to *al-Hilal* in 1914 by Mahmud

---

petitioners in the Syrian prerequisite cases. Syrian Americans from all over the United States contributed in amounts ranging from one to five dollars. *Al-Hoda*, a Syrian-American newspaper, compiled a list of the fifty donors on page five of its April 20, 1914, issue.

Sulayman Bu Karam, a Syrian immigrant living in Little Rock, Arkansas. In the midst of the Syrian prerequisite cases, Karam sought Zaydan's scholarly opinion on race. The implications of this letter are far-reaching and demonstrate Zaydan's influence on Syrian Americans' notions of race. Other letters sent to *al-Hilal* from the United States and other countries about the citizenship struggle provide evidence that Zaydan was up to date with the racial status of Syrian immigrants. Another premise of this study is that the Syrian citizenship campaign in the United States in turn inspired some elements of Zaydan's opus.

## Chapter 1: Historical Contextualization

It was only after two failed attempts at naturalization and a third appeal to the United States District Court in Charleston, South Carolina, that in 1915 naturalization courts deemed George Dow Caucasian, and therefore eligible for citizenship. Upon granting Dow citizenship, South Carolina Circuit Judge Woods stated:

Syrians are to be classed as white people... physically the modern Syrians are of mixed Syrian, Arabian, and even Jewish blood. They belong to the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race, thus widely differing from their rulers, the Turks, who are in origin Mongolian... they [Syrians] were so closely related to their neighbors on the European side of the Mediterranean that they should be classed as white, they must be held to fall within the term 'white persons.'<sup>17</sup>

Judge Woods' opinion on the racial origin of Syrians demonstrates how Syrian immigrants succeeded in distancing themselves from the Ottomans and aligning themselves closer to Europeans, in order to prove their Caucasian racial status. During the early twentieth century, George Dow and his fellow Syrian immigrants were a few amongst many immigrants vying for racial acceptance and the right to citizenship in the United States. Syrian immigrants arrived in the United States at a time when racial purity dominated nativist rhetoric. While Syrians took their cases to various state naturalization courts in the United States to pursue the racial status of Caucasian, Chinese, Japanese, Armenian, Mexican and

---

<sup>17</sup> Dow v. United States, 226 F. 145, D.C.S.C., (1915).

Southeast Asian immigrants, amongst other groups, did the same. By 1924, the United States federal government considered Syrians as part of the Caucasian race, while other non-European immigrant groups were still battling for their racial inclusion. At times, Syrian immigrants along with other immigrants groups argued for their racial status as both Caucasian and white. For the sake of coherency this study will focus on the application of the term “Caucasian.”

How were Syrians able to convince the naturalization courts during the early twentieth century of their membership in the Caucasian race and their right to American citizenship, and what arguments did they use? What were the influences from which Syrian immigrants were deriving their notions of race? Syrians’ encounter with nativist sentiments upon their arrival in the United States made race a central component of their identity formation as immigrants, but notions of race amongst Syrian immigrants did not develop in a vacuum. This research challenges the notion that Syrians learned ideas of race strictly from their experiences in the United States. Racial beliefs that developed in the Middle East with the rise of Phoenicianism -- the belief held by Syro-Lebanese nationalists that linked Christian Syrians to the ancient Phoenicians racially — along with Arab nationalism, contributed greatly to the racial theories of Syrian Americans.

When Judge Woods declared that Syrians were of “mixed Syrian, Arabian, and Jewish blood,” as well as related to the Europeans, he demonstrated the convergence of various nationalist ideologies occurring in the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century. Phoenicianists in the Middle East argued for a

distinct Syro-Lebanese identity with roots in the Indo-European race, while proponents of Arab nationalism such as Jurji Zaydan argued for the unity of the Arab peoples under the Caucasian and Semitic labels. The racial theories presented by Zaydan and Phoenicianists in the Middle East, along with the rise of social sciences as a scholarly discipline in the Middle East, heavily influenced Syrian American immigrants' claim to American citizenship. *Mahjar* (diaspora) newspapers and journals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf*, dedicated many articles and editorials to the issue of biologically determined race. Historians of Middle Eastern immigration generally argue that upon their arrival in the United States, Syrian immigrants had no conceptualization of race and instead, identified with their family name, village, or religion. It was not until they settled in the United States that they embraced racial hierarchies in a society that fixated on race.

### Background and Demographics

The first-hand experiences of Syrians dealing with racial discrimination in the United States increased their desire to identify with the Caucasian race; however, the rise of Western education in Syria and other parts of the Middle East had already brought European and American biological racial theories to that region. In the early nineteenth century, American missionaries opened schools and churches that distributed missionary material in Syria.<sup>18</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, American missionaries contributed heavily to the education sectors of Syrian society, particularly in Mount Lebanon, where the majority of

---

<sup>18</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigration Experience* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1985), 35.

the population was Christian. The proliferation of primary and secondary missionary schools resulted in many more Syrians pursuing higher education. The American University of Beirut, established in 1866, is a testimony to the extent of American influence on Syrian education.<sup>19</sup>

The expanding educational systems created by missionaries in parts of Syria generated Syrian intelligentsia who worked under the intellectual guidance of an American school of thought, especially that of the American University. From this group of Syrian intellectuals evolved a “modern Arabic idiom and style suitable for the expression of Western ideas”<sup>20</sup> that culminated in an articulate Western-influenced intelligentsia and a new journalistic and literary movement.<sup>21</sup> Exploring the contribution and influence of these men and their disciples on pre-existing Western theories of race, which in turn informed Syrian Americans about their quest for citizenship is essential for this study. Of course, not all Syrians received missionary schooling. Historian Benjamin Fortna has conducted research on the late-Ottoman education system and argues that during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), Ottoman education policy relied heavily on Islamic tradition while implementing aspects of Western schooling. In an attempt to compete with missionary schools, the late-Ottoman state “assigned education the conflicted task of attempting to ward off Western encroachment by adapting

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>21</sup> See Albert Hourani’s discussion of the first generation of Ottomans to advocate for the adoption of some aspects of European societies, particularly the education of the masses and the development of literary journals and newspapers in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chapter 4.

Western-style education to suit Ottoman needs.”<sup>22</sup> Regardless of how Western-style education was delivered to the Syrian population, what is important to note is that Western influences had penetrated Syria by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and a new “class” of intellectuals developed as a product of that education.

### The Immigrants

The first wave of Ottoman immigrants to the United States arrived as early as 1820, but according to official statistics, immigrants from “Turkey in Asia” began to arrive in large numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Official United States records indicate that by 1910, a total of 59, 729 Ottomans immigrated to the United States, comprising one-third of all of the United States’ population that had been born in Asia.<sup>24</sup> Although the exact numbers are unknown, some scholars speculate that the majority of the Ottoman immigrants originated from Ottoman Syria. The Syrian immigrants who campaigned for citizenship in the United States and are central to this research, emigrated primarily from what is considered modern-day Lebanon. Many scholars of Middle Eastern immigration maintain that the first wave of Syrian

---

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>23</sup> The literature on Arab-Americans separates emigration to the United States into three distinct waves. The first wave encompasses immigrants from Ottoman Syria, who emigrated beginning in the nineteenth century through 1924. The second large wave occurred after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Many of these immigrants were of Palestinian origin along with other immigrants from various regions in the Middle East. With the passing of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which abolished the implementation of national quotas, an influx of Arabs immigrated to the United States. The third wave experienced many immigrants from Egypt, Iraq, modern Syria, and present-day Lebanon, Yemen, etc. The third wave of immigrants ranged in national, educational, and class origin and were unlike the first wave, many of whom were unskilled workers with limited capital upon their arrival.

<sup>24</sup> Kemal Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985): 181.

immigrants were of the Christian faith and emigrated due to religious persecution by the Ottoman government. This is unlikely because many Syrian immigrants professed their loyalty to the Ottoman regime prior to World War I. Scholars Alixa Naff and Kemal Karpat also challenge this notion and argue that although the majority of the first immigrants were of the Christian faith, there was a sizable population of Muslims as well. Through an analysis of the Syrian citizenship campaign and placing the early Syrian-American community in a transnational setting also indicates that the first wave of Syrian immigrants did not emigrate out of religious persecution. Discrimination may have been a secondary or tertiary cause, but it was not the primary motive for emigration since a large portion of the immigrants originated from Mount Lebanon, which at the time was considered a safe-haven, particularly for Christians who had left Beirut in search of religious autonomy in Mount Lebanon.<sup>25</sup>

Building on information provided by Turkish sources, Karpat demonstrates that a substantial number of Ottoman Muslims left their homes and travelled West on a journey to accumulate wealth in the New World.<sup>26</sup> Most Muslims in the United States preferred to pass as Christians, by changing their Muslim names and marrying non-Muslims, in hopes of gaining easier acceptance into American society.<sup>27</sup> The Christian immigrants from Syria were overwhelmingly of the Eastern-rite sects, mainly Maronite, Melkite, and Eastern Orthodox, and

---

<sup>25</sup> Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* ( Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 52.

<sup>26</sup> Karpat, " The Ottoman Emigration to America," 176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.



predominantly from the region of Mount Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> The immigrants left Syria when it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and for that reason, American immigration officials labeled them as Turks. Once in the United States, most immigrants identified themselves as being Syrian; it was not until the interwar period that the politically active percentage of Syrian immigrants adopted the term “Lebanese” to describe themselves (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). For the sake of coherence, the first wave of Syrian immigrants to the United States shall be referred to as Syrians rather than Lebanese.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, changes in the structures of the Ottoman economy and ethnoculture, coupled with the industrialization of North America resulted in the emigration of many Ottoman subjects to the New World.<sup>29</sup> The destruction of vineyards by phylloxera (a vine sucking insect), the opening of the Suez Canal, and the collapse of the Lebanese silk industry resulted in the economic dislocation of certain groups within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup> Even though the economic conditions affected many regions of the empire, the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon were disproportionately affected by these negative economic conditions due to Mount Lebanon’s administrative status, granted by the Ottoman government in 1861. Mount Lebanon’s position as a semi-autonomous province left the region cut off from resources provided by the Biga Valley and Tripoli; once the economic recession occurred in the Ottoman Empire, those living in Mount Lebanon were left with even fewer

---

<sup>28</sup> Naff, *Becoming American*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

resources than before and little hope for economic recovery.<sup>31</sup> The lack of economic opportunities in Mount Lebanon and the encouragement of emigration by Western governments resulted in the departure of many skilled and unskilled laborers to the New World in search of economic security. However, there were other events that could have possibly resulted in the perception of the United States as the land of opportunity. One known event is the Philadelphia Centennial Expedition of 1876, where individuals from Mount Lebanon were in attendance.<sup>32</sup> The stories the participants brought back with them to Syria could have been enough to pique the interest of Ottoman Syrians. Once in the New World, Syrian immigrants had to operate within the cultural framework of their host society. In both North and South America, Syrian immigrants embraced certain aspects of the new society while rejecting others. Those who immigrated to the United States quickly realized the centrality of race in American society and adjusted their worldview accordingly. No longer would the immigrants categorize themselves according to religion, family name, or village. Rather, race became fundamental to their identity.

### Biological Determinism

In order to discuss why some Syrian Americans argued they were part of the Caucasian race, it is essential to review the rise of biological racial theory. Men, tribes, and nation-states have utilized different markers to distinguish themselves from one another throughout the course of history. Racial ideas and categorization in the West during the eighteenth century were unique compared

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Khater, *Inventing Home*, 61.

to other previous theories of difference, because they were believed to be based on scientific fact and thus to represent objective truth. The aversion towards religious doctrine and the encouragement of scientific knowledge marked by the Enlightenment spawned the findings of eighteenth-century European ethnologists Carl Linnaeus and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. In 1735, Swedish naturalist, Carl Linnaeus, categorizing humans as a species within the primus genus, strayed from the Christian belief that man originated from a single species.<sup>33</sup> He proposed that four human race taxonomies existed, including some mythical and monstrous creatures.<sup>34</sup> Each race was categorized by region. For example, he listed the “white Europeans,” “red Americans”, “brown Asians,” and “black Africans.” He did not openly categorize the Arabs, which may indicate that his racial classifications were based solely on region. Linnaeus did not explicitly rank the different human types, but he did distinguish between each race’s ability with regards to self-government. He described Europeans as smart, inventive, and governed by the law.<sup>35</sup> He considered blacks, on the other hand, to be indolent, negligent, and governed by caprice.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Linnaeus, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German naturalist and anthropologist, argued that humans belonged to a single species that shared a common remote ancestry.<sup>37</sup> He divided mankind into five categories: Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, Americans, and Malays. He classified most of the Middle East as part of the

---

<sup>33</sup> George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Caucasian race, which implies that as early as the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans had ideas on the racial origin of Middle Easterners.

The claims made by European “scientists” on racial origins and the superiority of the Caucasian race eventually made their way to the Middle East. As biological explanations for the racial differences in man became prevalent in the Middle East, environmental and religious explanations for human distinctions diminished. Present-day scholars of race, including Stephen Jay Gould, George Fredrickson, and Audrey Smedley, have emphasized the difference between theories of race in the modern world in contrast to those in pre-modern societies. After the Enlightenment, scientists and intellectuals in the Western world shifted from religious and environmental explanations for human differences to biological explanations. By the nineteenth century, many intellectuals in the Western world came to view human differences that were otherwise considered ethnocultural or environmental in origin, as “innate, indelible, and unchangeable.”<sup>38</sup> This study charts the transmission of Western racial theories to the Arab world and the nascent stages of biological explanations for the differences in man.

#### The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924

Biological Determinism was not only relevant to racial identity, but also relevant because it impacted the law. Similar to many other historians, Mae Ngai, in her extensively researched book, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, focuses on the effects of Western biological racial theory on immigration law in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was one of the first attempts to block specific racial groups from

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 5.

immigrating to the United States. Another restrictive immigration law occurred in 1924 on a larger scale with the implementation of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, which limited immigration from certain regions of the world and resulted in a global racial hierarchy that favored specific racial groups over others. The Johnson-Reed Act was in response to the concerns of nativists--who believed that one's race determined his or her fitness for citizenship-- and to their fear of the influx of non-Nordic immigrants to the United States and their attempts to claim citizenship.

While the 1924 immigration law initially targeted southern and eastern Europeans, it restricted other immigrant groups as well, particularly Middle Easterners, East Asians, and Indians from the subcontinent. President Hoover declared it an act to "limit immigration of aliens into the United States, and for other purposes."<sup>39</sup> It can be assumed that the "other purposes" included a racial agenda. The national origins quota differentiated between "colored races" and "white people" who came from "white" countries.<sup>40</sup> Blacks, Mulattos, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians were not categorized by country of origin, but only portrayed by their "race." The quota system not only divided the world in terms of "European" and "non-European," but it also divided the world based on race. Only those deemed racially fit were eligible for citizenship. Many Americans in favor of the 1924 law argued that American resources should be preserved for Americans of unadulterated racial "stock." During the congressional debates over

---

<sup>39</sup> Presidential Proclamation 1872, March 22, 1929. A list of each country's quota and President Hoover's proclamation can be found at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus/4731703.PROC.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>, 7-10.

<sup>40</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 27.

the 1924 immigration law, Senator Ellison DuRant Smith of South Carolina stated:

I think that we have sufficient stock in America now for us to shut the door, Americanize what we have, and save the resources of America for the natural increase of our population...Thank God we have in America perhaps the largest percentage of any country in the world of the pure, unadulterated Anglo-Saxon stock; certainly the greatest of any nation in the Nordic breed. It is for the preservation of that splendid stock that has characterized us that I would make this not an asylum for the oppressed of all countries, but a country to assimilate and perfect that splendid type of manhood that has made America the foremost Nation in her progress and in her power, and yet the youngest of all the nations.<sup>41</sup>

It is evident from the rhetoric of Senator DuRant that by 1924 there was increased pressure for immigrants in the United States to assimilate and that there existed a racial hierarchy that favored the “unadulterated” races, particularly those of Anglo-Saxon stock. By 1924, the United States had, in fact, shut its doors to many immigrants. The immigration laws of the 1920s allowed for a quota of approximately 100 immigrants a year from each Middle Eastern country, which included Egypt, Palestine/ trans-Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula. Turkey was given a quote of 226 immigrants per year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that immigration officials did

---

<sup>41</sup> Senator Ellison DuRant Smith [SC], “Shut The Door,” *Congressional Record* 68 (April 9, 1924): E5961–5962. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5080/> (accessed October 9, 2012).

not adhere strictly to the 100-person quota, but nevertheless by the interwar period, Syrian immigration to the United States had witnessed a substantial decline. It was not until 1965 that the United States would re-open its doors, welcoming immigrants from the Middle East again. Based on the precedent set by the first wave of Syrian immigrants to the United States, the second large wave of Middle Eastern immigrants would enter the United States as Caucasians with the undeniable legal right of becoming American citizens.

## Chapter 2: Social History

The first Syrian immigrants to arrive in the United States during the late nineteenth century were not as numerous as other immigrant groups, but their contributions and history should not be overlooked. After all, the story goes that Ernest Hamwi, a Syrian immigrant, brought the concept of an ice cream cone to the country during the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair (The Louisiana Purchase Exposition).<sup>42</sup> Hamwi was selling "zalabia," a crisp wafer pastry that originated in the Middle East, when an ice cream vendor next door ran out of dishes for his product. Hamwi quickly rolled one of his pastries into the shape of a cone to help his neighbor, thus creating a popular American dessert.

The story behind Hamwi's "claim to fame" appears a bit too simplistic and it is of no surprise that it has generated controversy. Historical clues point to the innovation of the cone by others, primarily Abe Doumar, another Syrian immigrant. Regardless of who brought the ice cream cone to the United States, it is important to note that the lifestyles of Hamwi and Doumar are characteristic of many of those of the first Syrian Americans. Abe Doumar, for example, came to the United States in 1895 or 1896 at the age of fifteen. He first worked as a souvenir salesman at fairs across the nation. After he retired from selling souvenirs (and after he claimed to have invented the ice cream cone), he moved to Norfolk, Virginia and opened Doumar's Cones and Barbecue. His store is still operating today and has become somewhat of a local legend.

---

<sup>42</sup> For more information on the history of the ice cream cone, see "Who Invented the Ice Cream Cone" *Saudi Aramco World*, accessed May 15, 2013, [http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/young\\_readers.world/who.invented.the.ice.cream.cone/](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/young_readers.world/who.invented.the.ice.cream.cone/).



Unlike southern and eastern Europeans, who comprised a sizable portion of the new immigrant population at the turn of the twentieth century, only an estimated 320,000 Syrians emigrated between 1881 and 1901, which nonetheless amounted to one-sixth of Syria's total population.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned previously, many migrated from Mount Lebanon, and it is thought that by the early twentieth century, one-third of its population had left for the New World. However, the 1920 United States Census listed 51,900 Syrians as part of the foreign-born white population.<sup>44</sup> Due to the unreliability of the U.S. immigration records, however, it is likely that the actual number was more than officially indicated and closer to the 320,000 amount. Many of the immigrants were listed as Ottomans or Turks upon arrival. Some could have also entered the United States through Mexico and Canada, in fear of being turned away and thus are not properly documented.<sup>45</sup>

Similar to Hamwi and Doumar, the majority of Syrians arrived in the United States as unskilled workers in search of economic prosperity. With the little money they had, many eventually launched their own businesses and shops. Data from the United States Immigration Commission shows that in 1911, 50.8% of Syrian immigrants were unskilled farmers and factory workers, while 22.7% were in skilled occupations and 20.3% were engaged in trade.<sup>46</sup> Their rates of

---

<sup>43</sup> Karpas, "The Ottoman Emigration to America," 181.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Vol. 2, General Report and Analytical Tables* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 805. As quoted in Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Report on the Immigration Commission, vol. 1 (Washington D.C., 1911), 100. As quoted in Kamal Karpas, "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985): 180.

occupation were slightly higher in trade and skilled professions relative to other immigrant populations.<sup>47</sup> Historical scholarship has focused on the impact of peddling on the first Syrian Americans. Alixa Naff has argued that peddling led to the accumulation of wealth and rapid assimilation of Syrians in the United States. Although that appears to be partially true for Abe Doumar, who eventually saved enough money from peddling to open his diner, it is not the case for all of the first Syrian Americans. Using the Bonahoom family as a case study, evidence suggests that some immigrants opened restaurants and various shops immediately, without ever engaging in peddling. The history of the Bonahoom family also demonstrates that the first immigrants did not completely assimilate and relinquish their ties to the Syrian heritage. While the remaining chapters of this thesis focus on the continuity and transnational nature of intellectual and ethno-national thought amongst the early immigrants, this chapter highlights the Syrian cultural continuity amongst this group. The experiences of members of the Bonahoom family also confirm that naturalization was important to the early immigrants, as they denied their affiliation with the Ottoman regime in order to become American citizens.

### The Bonahooms

According to Barbara Bonahoom, her grandfather Saleem (who went by the name “Sam”) emigrated from Zahle in Ottoman Syria, to the United States in the late nineteenth century. Saleem first settled in Toledo, Ohio, where he engaged in factory work, and later moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana. While in Fort Wayne, he became involved in the restaurant business with his uncle, Otto.

---

<sup>47</sup> Kemal Karpat cites these numbers in “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914.”

Saleem eventually owned his own shop, Busy Bee's Candy, where he sold fruit, fine candies, and cigars, and lived in an apartment above the store. Saleem married in the United States and the story of his marital relationship goes against the claim that the early immigrants married outside their culture. Saleem married Sultana (who went by the name "Mary"), another Syrian immigrant. Sultana was born in Syria, but immigrated to the United States with her parents during her teenage years. In the words of Barbara, Sultana earned her income from selling buttons and "odds and ends."

Barbara indicated that Sultana saved enough money to assist other family members to move to the United States, which was typical of many Syrian Americans who migrated for economic reasons. This financial support made grateful relatives view the United States as a place of economic prosperity. It can be imagined how Sultana's family perceived the country that provided them with funds for travel. Barbara stated that many of Sultana's newly married family who lived overseas (post 1924) would spend their honeymoons in Fort Wayne, which indicates that some Syrians saw it as a desirable location.

Even though Saleem and Sultana went by mainstream American names, it appears that they were relatively in touch with their Syrian heritage. As previously discussed, Sultana helped members of her family migrate to the United States, and also kept in contact with relatives in Syria. Barbara recalls her "Syrian picnics," where members of her extended family gathered to eat Syrian cuisine. Her parents were Orthodox Christians and attended church regularly. It is important to highlight that Barbara recalls her parents and extended family

referring to themselves as Syrians, not Lebanese, though Zahle, their ancestral home, was located in what became, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the French Mandate of Lebanon and, later, independent Lebanon.

From Barbara's accounts, it seems that her grandparents remained attached to the religion, cuisine, and culture of their homeland. However, her father, Fu'ad, who was born in Fort Wayne, seemed to have less of a connection with his Syrian heritage. According to Barbara, Fu'ad knew some Arabic words but seldom spoke the language, especially when at home. Fu'ad married Barbara's mother, Garnet Richardson, and converted to Catholicism.

Growing up, Fu'ad attended public schools and graduated with a high school diploma. He was politically inclined and after graduation, entered the Sheriff's Reserve as a motorcycle patrolman. In the 1950s, he joined the department as a full-time deputy sheriff. His political interest also led to his appointment as a precinct committeeman for the Republican Party in Fort Wayne. Towards the end of his career as a deputy sheriff, Fu'ad ran for sheriff but did not win the nomination. He eventually retired and became a city clerk.

#### The Importance of Naturalization

It is not known for certain whether Abe Doumar or Saleem Bonahoom are representative of all the early Syrian immigrants, just as it is unknown how many were concerned with George Dow's struggle for naturalization. However, evidence suggests that naturalization was a matter of much concern for the greater Syrian-American community during the early years of their settlement. Saleem Bonahoom's naturalization papers offer insight into the naturalization

experiences of the early immigrants. While some immigrants, such as George Dow, struggled to attain citizenship, Saleem Bonahoom had no problem. Saleem was approved for naturalization on October 16, 1894, in Cook County, Illinois. According to Barbara, Saleem spent some time in Illinois, although she could not recall the reason. There is a section in the naturalization documents where Saleem was required to renounce his allegiance to the “Sultan of Turkey.” The documents also state that Saleem had “sustained good moral character” and seemed to be “attached to the principles contained” in the United States Constitution. His “happiness” was also a personal attribute mentioned in the naturalization records.

The discrepancies between the naturalization experiences of George Dow and Saleem Bonahoom indicate that not every Syrian immigrant faced the same obstacles. However, the fact that the SAA and members of the larger Syrian-American community raised funds to support Dow implies that naturalization was important to many Syrians. Another reason why Syrians subsidized the funds necessary for Dow’s naturalization petition could be that Dow was financially unstable and could not afford an attorney. Many immigrants upon their arrival did not have much wealth. Each donor gave from one to five dollars, which at the time was not extravagant. The range in donation amounts could also suggest that the donors varied in class or financial status, indicating that his case appealed to Syrian immigrants from various economic backgrounds.

### Class Stratification

Just as it cannot be assumed that all Syrian immigrants peddled their way to financial success, it can be inferred through an analysis of the naturalization campaign that not all immigrants arrived unskilled or in need of economic opportunities. This is where the “republic of letters” and the rise of Western-style education during the late Ottoman period come into play. The highly active and political members of the naturalization campaign and the Syrian-American community, such as Kalil Bishara, Na’um Mokarzel, Salloum Mokarzel, and Philip Hitti, appear to have been part of an educated elite. Kalil Bishara, for example, must have had some formal education based on the knowledge and command of language shown in his book, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*. Philip Hitti is known to have received training at the American University of Beirut and later became the chair of Oriental languages at Princeton University. It was reported that in 1905, fifty-eight graduates of the Syrian Protestant College lived in the United States, while some of the remaining graduates were in Egypt.<sup>48</sup>

The question arises whether the Syrian immigrants writing to Jurji Zaydan from the United States were part of an educated elite or whether they represented average concerned citizens. It is possible that some of the early immigrants lacked formal education or the ability to read, but perhaps the coffee-shop social scene from the Middle East had made its way into the United States. In the Middle East (and other parts of the world), coffee shops were popular venues to discuss politics and other matters of importance. That model could have been transplanted to the United States by Syrian immigrants, and thus it is not inconceivable that an illiterate immigrant came across topics discussed in

---

<sup>48</sup> Karpal, “The Ottoman Migration to America,” 180.

either Syrian-American newspapers or *al-Hilal*. It is also possible that members of the same local Syrian community encouraged one another to write to Zaydan or co-wrote each letter. If so, each letter could be representative of more than one reader or even the larger Syrian-American community.

### Chapter 3: Transnational Rhetoric

When George Dow, a Syrian immigrant from Charleston, South Carolina, petitioned for naturalization in the spring of 1914, he came with an entourage of supporters from the Syrian American Association (SAA). After District Judge Henry Smith had rejected his petition earlier that year, Dow and the SAA developed what they believed was a well thought-out argument to prove Dow's racial fitness. They listed four reasons why Dow should be admitted to citizenship. To Dow's dismay, however, Judge Smith refuted all four arguments and once again denied him naturalization, on the grounds that he was not "of European nativity or descent."<sup>49</sup>

Dow's second petition was one of five naturalization cases in the South that dealt with immigrants of Syrian origin during the early twentieth century. The only such cases that occurred outside the South were in the district courts of Massachusetts and Oregon, which granted both applicants citizenship after their first petitions. Neither judge required proof of European ancestry, but rather focused on scientific explanations for admittance and each applicant's personal characteristics. For example, for Tom Ellis, a Syrian immigrant living in Oregon, his "good morals," sobriety and "industrious skills" impressed the judge, who immediately granted him naturalization in 1910. The judge was also pleased with Ellis' ability to speak and write English, and also noted his positive disposition toward the United States government.<sup>50</sup> For George Najour from Georgia and Mudarri from Massachusetts, two of the first Syrian immigrants to participate in

---

<sup>49</sup> In Re Dow, 213 F. 355, E.D.S.C., (1914).

<sup>50</sup> In Re Ellis, 179 F. 1002, D. Or., (1910).



the prerequisite cases, “scientific evidence” worked in their favor, as the judges presiding over their cases in 1909 and 1910 respectively, turned to anthropological texts to justify their Caucasian statuses.

It is no surprise that a majority of the Syrian naturalization cases occurred in the South, where color consciousness and fear of fractures in the black-white line were most prevalent. While members of the Northern intelligentsia produced literature on Anglo-Saxon “race suicide” and aligned themselves with the advocates of eugenics, Southern whites, on the other hand, were concerned with the uncertain racial status of new immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> With the growing fear that new immigrants would undermine white supremacy and with the creation of the United States Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in 1906, which was created to keep records and provide uniform rules for naturalization, the citizenship and racial status of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants fell under increased scrutiny. Even though federal law limited naturalization to “white men,” who was considered white was a heated topic of discussion in the South. It is for that reason that the years 1909 through 1915 registered the highest volume of Syrian immigrants petitioning for naturalization.<sup>52</sup>

Even though each Syrian naturalization case is a valuable resource, this chapter focuses on George Dow’s case in particular because it provides the most information on the Syrian-American racial ideology during the first quarter of the

---

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2009), 54.

<sup>52</sup> See the appendix of Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

twentieth century. Due to the popularity of Dow's case among the greater Syrian-American community at the time, it offers insight into the larger Syrian-American quest for citizenship and highlights its transnational nature. Each argument presented by Dow and the SAA spoke to different themes. In one instance, they attempted to appeal to the Christian sensibilities of the Southern judges; in other instances, they employed scientific rationales or highlighted their glorious ancestry. Most importantly, Dow and the SAA's rhetoric symbolized the convergence of the different nationalist movements that occurred simultaneously in the Middle East. While Dow and his fellow immigrants presented their arguments as to why the United States naturalization courts should accept them as part of the Caucasian race, they also channeled some of the same theories presented by the early proponents of Phoenicianism and Arab nationalism.

These ethno-national movements took a unique spin in the United States among early Syrian immigrants, since they became not only ways for immigrants to argue for their Caucasian racial origin, but a means by which they justified their Semitic ancestry. Unlike advocates of Phoenicianism in the Middle East, who claimed kinship with the Indo-European race, Syrians in the United States, prior to the end of World War I, focused solely on their Semitic origin, with traces of Phoenician and Arab "stock" as well. They created their own narrative for the racial origin of the modern Syrians by incorporating some elements of Phoenicianism and Arabism. Due to their vague racial status in the first quarter of the twentieth century and their compromised position as Ottoman subjects given the Ottoman Empire's solidarity with the Central Powers during World World I,

Syrian immigrants felt it necessary to convince American naturalization courts, along with the American public, that they were historically and scientifically part of the Caucasian race.

#### George Dow and Company

To chart the progression of racial logic in the early Syrian-American community, it is essential to begin with the first prerequisite case, *In Re Najour*. Although this 1909 case, held in a district court in Georgia, provides some information as to why the applicant, George Najour, was accepted as an American citizen, it does not offer much detail on his arguments. The same applies to Tom Ellis' case; the presiding judge felt that Ellis was a "good and highly respected citizen in the community"<sup>53</sup> and approved his petition relatively quickly and without question. In a similar case held in South Carolina in 1913, the applicant, Faras Shahid, was denied racial suitability and thus naturalization on the basis that he "could neither read or write English" and had "no understanding for the manner and methods of government in America."<sup>54</sup> When the judge asked Shahid if he was a polygamist or a disbeliever in organized government, he answered in the affirmative because he did not understand the questions.<sup>55</sup>

The court records do not indicate what Ellis and Shahid argued as grounds for their right to naturalization or inclusion in the Caucasian race. However, these cases show the importance of reputation, English language skills, and personal image for both membership in the Caucasian race and the right to citizenship. In the words of historian Matthew Frye Jacobson, during the

---

<sup>53</sup> *In Re Ellis*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ex Parte Shahid*, 205 F. 812., (1913).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, race was not just a “conception; it [was] also a perception.”<sup>56</sup> The Syrian prerequisite cases highlight this phenomenon.

Although the judge in Dow’s case stated that he perceived immigrants from Batroun, the coastal region of Ottoman Syria where the applicant was born, as “lighter in color”<sup>57</sup> than other Syrians, he still rejected his petition. Perception did not work in favor of George Dow, who, unlike George Najour and Tom Ellis, did not become an American citizen until after his third petition. Dow’s first petition was in February of 1914. Upon denying him citizenship, the judge stated:

In donating the privilege the people of the United States have seen fit under the description of free white persons to restrict such foreigners to persons of European habitancy and descent. The applicant being an Asiatic does not come within the terms of the statute...<sup>58</sup>

The judge expressed the idea that because of the applicant’s “Asiatic” background, Dow was not fit for naturalization. As a reaction to Dow’s initial petition, Dow and the SAA returned two months later and presented their new argument. First, they claimed that “white persons,” as described in the Naturalization Act of 1790, meant persons of the Caucasian race and not persons white in color. Second, they held that Dow was a Semite or a member of one of the Semitic nations and that Semites are part of the

---

<sup>56</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>57</sup> *In Re Dow*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ex Parte Dow*, 211 F. 486., E.D.S.C., (1914).

Caucasian or white race. Third, they compared their situation to that of European Jews, whom the United States previously admitted as citizens “without question,” and argued that Jews, who are similar in racial lineage to Syrians, are members of the Semitic peoples. Lastly, Dow and his advocates reasoned that the “history and position of the Syrians, their connection through all time with the peoples to whom the Jewish and Christian peoples owe their religion,” made it “inconceivable that the [1790 Naturalization Statute]<sup>59</sup> could have intended to exclude them.”<sup>60</sup>

### Transnational Rhetoric

The arguments put forth by Dow and the SAA must be placed in the context of racial and nationalist ideologies in the Middle East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dow expressed some of the same ideas as Middle Eastern proponents of Phoenicianism, a myth of origin for the Syro-Lebanese people that emerged in the nineteenth century, when he glorified the history of the Syrian peoples and claimed that modern Christians and Jews “owe their religion” to them. Although those in favor of Phoenicianism in the Middle East considered the ancient Phoenicians the bridge between the East and the West, they still argued that Syrians possessed a greater affinity with the West, especially with regards to racial and religious heritage. The Phoenician myth had certain mythological elements of ancestry, migration, liberation, golden

---

<sup>59</sup> The 1790 Naturalization Statute limited naturalization to “free white men” who had resided in the United States for at least two years. A copy of the statute can be found at: <http://www.indiana.edu/~kdhist/H105-documents-web/week08/naturalization1790.html>.

<sup>60</sup> In Re Dow.

age, decline, and most importantly, rebirth.<sup>61</sup> Its proponents asserted that the term originated from the Greek word *phoenix*, meaning “red,” which referred to the textile commerce of the ancient Phoenicians.<sup>62</sup> The Phoenician myth held that around the second millennium BC, Canaanite tribes, who belonged to the Indo-European, and not the Arab race, arrived in Greater Syria. Soon afterwards, they built large sea-trading networks and founded many colonies; the residents of the north established city-states and distinguished themselves in maritime commerce.<sup>63</sup> Among their greatest contributions to history were the alphabet, naval skills, and their unparalleled capacity for commerce and trade. The myth asserted that the decline of ancient Phoenicia was a result of Arab-Islamic conquest. Promoters of Phoenicianism in the Middle East advocated for a separate Christian-Syrian identity in the Middle East during the interwar period. While their attitudes eventually helped promote an independent Lebanon, more importantly, some of their rhetoric transcended national borders and was adopted by Syrian immigrants in the United States.

Dow and the SAA did not cite Phoenicianism directly, but they alluded to it by mentioning Syria’s great “history.” Judge Smith referred to Phoenicia many times in the context of the applicant’s argument. For example, he described Dow as coming from “the ancient city of Batroun, on the coast of the Lebanon district,” which was previously “occupied by the Phoenicians.”<sup>64</sup> Around the time of Dow’s second petition in 1914, some of the Syrian-American community paraded their

---

<sup>61</sup> Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2004), 174.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>64</sup> *In Re Dow*.

racial connection to the ancient Phoenicians in several publications, such as *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, published in 1914 by Kalil Bishara, and a decade later, *The Origins of the Syrians*, published in 1924 by Philip Hitti. Hitti's text is a valuable resource for the study of Syrian immigrants. However, it is better suited for information on the Syrian-American community after they had succeeded in their citizenship campaign. On the other hand, Kalil Bishara published *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* at the peak of the Syrian campaign for naturalization and racial inclusion. In this work, Bishara, a Syrian living in the United States, attempted to determine "the racial identity of the modern Syrian."<sup>65</sup> Bishara dedicated his publication to the "personified common sense of the American people" and the "Syrian immigrant."<sup>66</sup> He clearly wrote on behalf of the Syrians who were then trying to prove their racial status to the American public. In his introduction, Bishara stated, "It is the purpose of [this] treatise, to set forth with high precision, the evidence conducive to the determination of the racial identity of the modern Syrian."<sup>67</sup> The purpose of his research was to determine if "the main stock of the modern population in Syria [was] Caucasian, Mongolian, or African—white, yellow, or black."<sup>68</sup>

In his first chapter, "Prehistoric Times," Bishara spoke of the Stone Age in Syria, as "before the alphabet was invented" by the Phoenicians, whom Bishara claimed were Syrians themselves.<sup>69</sup> Aside from proving the link between modern

---

<sup>65</sup> Kalil A. Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* (New York: Al-Hoda Publishing House, 1914),

5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Syrians and ancient Phoenicians, Bishara sought to substantiate the assertion that the former were of Semitic origin, and thus racially white. He attempted to appeal to the religious side of the American public by citing the Old Testament, which spoke of the Canaanites. He argued that in the “narrower sense, the term [Canaanites] was indicative of the Phoenicians,” along with other tribes that occupied the coast.<sup>70</sup> He then asserted that all the ancient tribes mentioned in the Old Testament were “racially white, almost wholly belonging to the Semitic family.”<sup>71</sup>

After establishing the link with ancient Phoenicia, it is in his second chapter, “Historic Syria,” that Bishara elaborated on what he defined as the racial origin of the modern Syrian. He divided the ancient Syrian population into three groups: Semites, Aryans, and an unclassified race.<sup>72</sup> The Semites, along with other tribes occupying the coast of Syria, he categorized as descendants of Abraham. He continued that although not all historians considered the Phoenicians Semites, “by none have [they] been racially enlisted as anything but white.” This indicates that Bishara was familiar with other theories that did not include Phoenicians as part of the Semitic race, but that his overarching goal was to prove the white racial status of the ancient Syrians, which in his eyes meant proving their Semitic origin.

Bishara also referred to George Rawlinson’s book, *The History of Phoenicia*,<sup>73</sup> which was used by Phoenicianists in the Middle East. However,

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>73</sup> See: George Rawlinson, *The History of Phoenicia* (London: Longmans & Green, 1889).



Bishara did not directly mention any of the Syro-Lebanese nationalists who supported Phoenicianism, even though much of his argument stemmed from their ideology. The reason for Bishara's omission is that maybe he wanted to appeal to the logic of the Americans by quoting Western intellectuals who corroborated his claims. Historian Sarah Gualtieri highlights the discrepancies between Bishara's text as published in Arabic and English. In the English text, Bishara listed figures in Semitic history, such as Moses, Elijah, Hannibal, Amos, Paul, Peter, and John.<sup>74</sup> In the Arabic version, he mentioned the same historical personages, but included the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>75</sup> The omission of the Prophet Muhammad in the English text could have been a strategic move by Bishara, who did not wish to jeopardize Syrians' standing in the United States by associating them with Muslims, whom Americans perceived with superstition and ignorance.<sup>76</sup> Along with including the Prophet Muhammad in the roll of respectable Semites, Bishara stated his purpose more vehemently in his Arabic edition, as an attempt to reply to those who denied Syrian immigrants the status of Caucasians and identified them as Mongolians, thus making them ineligible for citizenship.<sup>77</sup> The inconsistencies between the two editions of Bishara's text imply that the Arabic version was for a broader audience, not just for Syrian Americans, because excluding the Prophet Muhammad would have offended many Muslims in the Middle East and would have discredited his claims. Bishara would not have published the text in English had he not intended it for an

---

<sup>74</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

international readership. This is an instance where communication regarding Syrian racial status occurred across national borders.

Bishara's text also indicates that it was not until the interwar period that Syrian immigrants adopted the Lebanese identity as separate from the Arab. Historian Asher Kaufman argues that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a duality existed in the Middle East between the Syrian and Lebanese identities, which was sharpened in the United States among Syrian immigrants. He cites the example of Na'um Mokarzel, a Syrian immigrant in the United States, who founded the Syrian-American publication *al-Hoda* (The Guidance) in 1898. Mokarzel was an active member of the early Syrian-American community and the founder of the SAA. It is speculated that because of his involvement in the Lebanon League of Progress, a society created in the United States in 1911 to ensure the autonomy of Mount Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire, Mokarzel advocated for the establishment of Lebanon as a non-Arab entity. Mokarzel did, in fact, express the need for the sovereignty of Mount Lebanon during his participation in the 1913 Arab Congress in Paris, although, he did not promote a "non-Arab" Lebanon. After all, the role of the congress was to address the needs of Arabs under Ottoman rule.

An examination of Bishara's text indicates that Mokarzel could not have supported the idea of a non-Arab Lebanon prior to World War I. Mokarzel himself printed Bishara's book using *al-Hoda's* publication house. Bishara even dedicated the first page of his work to Mokarzel and stated:

[A] special reference should be made, in regard of this publication, to my friend, N.A. Mokarzel, Esquire, of New York, the author and able editor of the daily *al-Hoda*, who besides suggesting to me the treatment of this subject [the origin of the modern Syrian] in Arabic, has also generously undertaken to publish this work at his own outlay.<sup>78</sup>

If Mokarzel was an avid supporter of a non-Arab Lebanon before the interwar period, why would he pay for and agree to publish a text that embraced Syria as an Arab entity? Advocating for Syria as an Arab nation and the Syrians as Semites contradicted Phoenicianism and the Lebanist

idea. Not only did Bishara make a racial link between the Syrians and the Arabs, whom he claimed were both Semitic, but he explicitly categorized Syria as part of the Arab world when he stated, “In a word, modern Syria may be safely regarded [as] a part of the Arabian world, with regard to customs, language, and blood.”<sup>79</sup>

Bishara perceived Syrians as not only racially linked to the Arabs, but also culturally and linguistically affiliated as well.

#### Ottoman Pride, The Semitic Wave Theory and Arab Nationalism

Phoenicianism was not the only nationalistic and racial ideology that made its way into the consciousness of the first Syrian-American immigrants. As Kemal Karpat stresses, there existed Christians and Muslims—Sunni, Shia, and Druze—in the early Syrian-American community. Phoenicianism, even in its early stages, was a Christian-Syrian movement in the Middle Eastern context.

Although Syrians in the United States attempted to distinguish themselves from

---

<sup>78</sup> Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Muslims, they could not afford to alienate the non-Christian members of their national community because if Syrians in the United States were to convince the American government and public of their Caucasian status, they had to appear as a cohesive unit. This was especially true since donations from members of the larger Syrian-American community were necessary in order to advance the naturalization campaign. It was not until the interwar period that a shift in attitude developed toward Islam, along with heightened support for a Lebanon free from Muslim intervention.

Due to the attachment of the Syrian immigrants to their homeland, many conflicts arose in the early years of the Syrian-American community regarding loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. Historians of Syrian immigration have underscored the support of the early Syrian-American newspapers for the Ottoman regime. The New York-based paper *al-Ayyam* (The Times), for instance, criticized the owner of another Syrian-American newspaper, *al-'Alam* (The World), in 1899 for printing editorials that discouraged Syrian immigrants from naturalization and that urged them to remember their position as sojourners in the United States.<sup>80</sup> *Al-Ayyam* even went so far as accusing *al-'Alam* of being the puppet of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>81</sup> There are many more instances where support for the Ottoman government resulted in disputes within the early Syrian-American community. However, most of the rhetoric used to either support or criticize the Ottoman government prior to World War I was not racialized but more nationalistic in nature. However, Syrian-American attitudes toward the

---

<sup>80</sup> For more information on the earliest Syrian-American newspapers see *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, pages 82-87.

<sup>81</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 85.

Ottoman government gradually became more negative and racialized during their campaign for citizenship. By World War I, many Syrian immigrants did not openly identify with the Ottoman regime for fear of harassment by the United States government, which had entered the war against the Ottomans. After the United States passed the 1917 Naturalization Act, declaring Syrians as eligible for naturalization, Syrians in the United States became more politically united under the identity of “free white persons.”

As shown by the naturalization cases of George Dow and Faras Shahid, becoming a “free white person” did not come easily for many Syrian Americans. To do this, they attempted to prove their positive contributions to American society, their Caucasian racial status, their glorious history, and their Semitic origin. It was a logical move for Syrians to position themselves in line with Jewish immigrants, since the United States had previously granted Jews the right to naturalize. But why did Syrian Americans such as George Dow, members of the SAA, and Kalil Bishara insist on the Semitic origin of the Syrian people? The simplest explanation could be that they desired to once again appeal to the religious sector of American society. However, through an analysis of the racial discourse that occurred concurrently in the Middle East, there is evidence to support the claim that Syrians learned of their supposed Semitic roots from different theories that first developed in the West in the seventeenth century and were then transmitted to the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A clear indication that Phoenicianism was not the only ideology employed by Syrian immigrants was Bishara’s reference to the Prophet

Muhammad. The most basic premise of Phoenicianism was that Syrians had their origin in the Indo-European, not the Arab race. By including the Prophet Muhammad as one of the notable Semites in his Arabic text, Bishara associated modern Syrians with an individual from the Arabian Peninsula who was clearly not of Indo-European descent. Bishara omitted the Prophet Muhammad from the English version, but kept the same message: Syrians were Semites. Dow's, the SAA's, and Bishara's declaration that Syrians were of Semitic origin was not an uncommon description of their racial ancestry at the time. The narrative was derived from the Semitic Wave Theory, which argued that the Semitic people originated in the Arabian Peninsula and then migrated to the Fertile Crescent. Bishara embraced elements of the Semitic Wave Theory by asserting that Syrians were Semites, yet he tailored his argument in the United States by excluding the Prophet Muhammad from the narrative and the Arabian Peninsula as the home of the first Semites.

The study of Semitic languages had gained traction in Western academic circles in the seventeenth century as part of an overall attempt to improve the understanding of the Scriptures.<sup>82</sup> The term "Semitic" was later coined in the eighteenth century by a German scholar in the broader context of the comparative study of Semitic languages. Nimrod Hurvitz draws attention to the many different questions that circulated in Western academia once Semitic languages became a subject of interest. Academicians speculated on whether the ancient Semites had one territorial origin or many; they also questioned

---

<sup>82</sup> Nimrod Hurvitz, "Muhibb ad-Din al-Khatib's Semitic Wave Theory and Pan-Arabism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1993): 118-134.

whether those who spoke the modern Semitic languages were of the same racial branch as the first Semites.<sup>83</sup> Many theories were created to answer these questions, including one that argued that the original home of the Semites was the Arabian Peninsula. This theory posited that because of climate changes, the peninsula could no longer accommodate all of its inhabitants, causing many of them to migrate to the Fertile Crescent.<sup>84</sup>

Muhibb ad-Din al-Khatib, born in Damascus in 1885, is credited as one of the primary Arab nationalists who disseminated the Semitic Wave Theory in the context of Pan-Arab ideology. He is characterized as the first to argue that the Arabian Peninsula was the Semites' first homeland. Al-Khatib certainly had a hand in propagating the theory in the Middle East, but not until after 1919, when he published a number of articles that presented the Semitic perception of history.<sup>85</sup> In his 1919 article, "Our Arab Nationalism," al-Khatib engaged in a debate regarding the origin of the modern Syrian. He argued for the erroneous nature of the Phoenicianist myth, which held that the ancient Phoenicians were racially linked to Europeans. He did not altogether dismiss the Syrian connection to the ancient Phoenicians, but instead expressed the same argument as his fellow Syrians in the United States—George Dow, the SAA, and Kalil Bishara. Al-Khatib stated that the Phoenicians were indeed the forefathers of the modern Syrians, but that because they had come from the Arabian Peninsula, they could not have been of European descent.<sup>86</sup> In the end, al-Khatib reiterated the Semitic

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Wave Theory, but included a twist that incorporated the ancient Phoenicians. Similar to other Arab Nationalists, al-Khatib desired to define the Arab identity from a historical point of view, yet he argued that science corroborated his claims for the Arabian Peninsula as the first home of the Semites.<sup>87</sup>

#### Jurji Zaydan's Semitic Intervention

Al-Khatib was not the first to describe the ancient Phoenicians as Semites or to use science to support his claims. Jurji Zaydan, a Syrian-born intellectual and participant in *al-Nahda* (The Renaissance), which George Antonius<sup>88</sup> defined as a period of great “cultural revolution”<sup>89</sup> in the Arab world, is most known for his writing on the history of the Arabs, for helping forge their modern identity, and for transmitting scientific knowledge through his use of the mass print media. It was Zaydan who first categorized the ancient Phoenicians as Semites in a response to an inquiry sent to him in 1914 from a Syrian living in Little Rock, Arkansas. Chapter 4 addresses this inquiry in greater depth, and it suffices here to highlight Zaydan's contribution to the labeling of the ancient Phoenicians as Semites.

Zaydan acted as a transmitter of European knowledge to the Middle East by popularizing different scientific theories through his short stories, novels, and journalism. One of his most impressive attributes as a writer was his ability to transmit Western concepts in terms that were familiar to the Arabs. For example, his 1912 text, *Tabaqat al-Umam* (The Classes of Nations), was named after a book written in the tenth-century Arab world, yet included new information from

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> George Antonius was one of the first historians of Arab nationalism. He wrote his book, *The Arab Awakening*, in 1938.

<sup>89</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (La Vergne, Tennessee: Simon Publications, 2001), 15.



the West on racial hierarchies. As an educator, he felt it was his duty to inform the masses about modern scientific knowledge. As the founder, writer, editor, and printer of his Cairo-based journal, *al-Hilal*, until his death in 1914, Zaydan strove to educate his readers, as is highlighted in the forward of the first issue:

Our plan is to be true to our objective, honest in our tone, and to endeavor to do our best for the task we have set out to perform. To achieve this, we must necessarily support all contemporary writers and intellectuals from every realm...what we aim at is to elicit the interest of the majority to read what we write, approve of it and forgive us our mistakes. If we accomplish this, we will have achieved satisfaction and will thus endeavor harder to attain what we consider our duty.<sup>90</sup>

In the foreword to *al-Hilal*, Zaydan expressed his commitment to his readers and a sense of accountability for the knowledge he shared in his journal. It also demonstrates Zaydan's pledge to engage with intellectuals and theories "from every realm." Zaydan published articles and answered questions from his readers on topics related to the modern sciences, particularly racial science, anthropology, and ethnology, etc. He served as a transmitter of Western knowledge particularly scientific theories. However, Zaydan was also a supporter of Arab nationalism, the political movement that gained traction in the early twentieth century. As advocates for Arab nationalism and science-based knowledge, it is no shock that al-Khatib and Jurji Zaydan both invested time in the study of the Semitic people.

---

<sup>90</sup> Jurji Zaydan in the first forward of *al-Hilal* in 1892. Translation provided by Ismail Serageldin.

Zaydan made many references in the early years of his academic career that linked the modern Syrians to the ancient Phoenicians. In the first issues of *al-Hilal* in 1892, he wrote, “The Syrians are natural-born merchants...they are raised in a nation whose origins go back to the ancient Phoenicians. Syria is a land of commerce and the coastal inhabitants excel in business.” Zaydan also published another article in 1892 titled “The Syrians in Egypt.” He reasoned that since Egypt had the Nile, which provided easy access for trade, the large-scale Syrian migration to that country during the late nineteenth century was a continuation of the Phoenician tradition of migration in search of economic opportunity. Zaydan also celebrated Syria’s heritage and historical achievements, as well as its people’s innate proclivity for trade and commerce, especially among the ancient Syrians who lived in the coastal regions. On the same page of *al-Hilal* appeared “The Phoenicians and Commerce,” an article that detailed the history of Phoenician trade markets and the long-standing economic relationship between ancient Phoenicia and Egypt. Historian Asher Kauffman perceives this emphasis on Phoenician history and its connection to Syria as part of Zaydan’s desire to combine his “old and new homes”<sup>91</sup> into one historical entity.

To many who deem him a prototypical member of the *Nahda* and a supporter of Arabism, it is important to understand that in his early years, Zaydan associated the modern Syrians with the ancient Phoenicians. However, it must be noted that although the main premise of many Phoenicianists in the Middle East was racial kinship with the West, there were several different theories

---

<sup>91</sup> Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2004), 42.

regarding the ancient Phoenicians prior to the interwar period, as shown through the case of the Syrian immigrants. Zaydan contributed to the myth by considering the ancient Phoenicians as part of the Semites.

### The Outcome

It was not until 1915 and his third petition that Dow became a naturalized American citizen. Moreover, this was not because of the argument presented by Dow and the SAA, but rather because the judge found supplementary scientific evidence in anthropological texts to substantiate his claim. Although the Semitic argument presented by Dow and the SAA in his second petition was not the only reason he attained citizenship, it did seem to have some effect on the next judge, who granted him naturalization. After citing different anthropological texts that included Syrians as part of the Caucasian race, the judge stated,

“Physically the modern Syrians are of mixed Semitic, Arabian, and even Jewish blood. They belong to the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race, thus differing widely from their rulers, the Turks, who are in origin Mongolian.”<sup>92</sup>

For Dow, the SAA, Bishara, and the greater Syrian-American community, claiming kinship with the ancient Phoenicians, Semites, and Jews was not enough to prove their racial fitness for naturalization. What worked in their favor were Western anthropologists and scientists who categorized them as part of the Caucasian race. If Syrians had held onto their claim that they were part of the white race but did not assert their Caucasian status, it would have jeopardized their standing in the United States. As the early Syrian-American community

---

<sup>92</sup> Dow v. United States, 226 F. 145., (1915).

petitioned for their right to citizenship, they also engaged with theories of racial science in the Middle East.

## Chapter 4: Racial Science

In the spring of 1914, when George Dow and the SAA petitioned for his naturalization for the second time; they maintained that the previous court's decision, which barred Dow from American citizenship, humiliated the Syrian-American community. The grounds for their supposed humiliation was that the applicant and his associates understood the refusal of their naturalization to mean that they did not belong to the Caucasian race, but to a colored and what they considered "an inferior race."<sup>93</sup> This chapter explores the context of the SAA and Dow's "humiliation" that resulted from being included as part of a "colored race." There is no doubt that during the time of Dow's petition, race was central to the new immigrants' identity because it defined their social and legal position in the United States. Syrian immigrants did not want to be identified with the Mongolian or black race for fear of alienation from American society.

While Syrian immigrants were exposed to racial ideologies in the United States, evidence of their communication with Jurji Zaydan suggests that the immigrants learned of the inferiority of the "colored" race and knowledge of their own racial origin from theories that developed in the Middle East simultaneously during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In order to understand Zaydan's influence and interaction with Syrians in the United States (which is discussed at length in Chapter 5), it is essential to chart the history of racial thought in the Middle East, in order to fully grasp the novelty of Zaydan's racial scholarship in the Arab world.

---

<sup>93</sup> In *Re Dow*, 213 F. 355, E.D.S.C., (1914).

Prior to Zaydan's racial theories, Middle Eastern scholars explained human differences in terms of environmental or religious characteristics. Zaydan pioneered the study of racial science and the ranking of human beings based on biologically determined factors in the Middle East. His beliefs on race developed during his time as the writer and editor of the journal, *al-Hilal*. Zaydan's various publications on race and human differences provide a lens into the progression of his racial ideology, which culminated in 1912 with his publication of *Tabaqat al-Umam*.

#### Racial Thought in the Middle East

Upon its publication, *Tabaqat al-Umam* embodied the convergence of Zaydan's pride in Arab history along with his passion for Western knowledge. When Zaydan published *Tabaqat al-Umam*, he borrowed research findings from Western scholars, as well as the title of his book, from an earlier study on human groups written in 1068 by Sa'id al-Andalusi, an eleventh-century Middle Eastern judge and philosopher. Before the publication of Sa'id's "Tabaqat al-Umam" there were long-standing beliefs in the Middle East (along with other parts of the world), that human distinctions were a product of the environment, especially skin color. For example, Ibn Qutayba, a ninth-century Iraqi scholar, attributed curly hair and blackness to the heat that overcooks infants in the womb.<sup>94</sup> He also explained the merit of the people of Babylon (part of present-day Iraq) due to their temperate climate.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'arif*, ed. Tharwat Ukasha (Cairo, Egypt: 1969), 26.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

As evidenced through Sa'id's "Tabaqat al-Umam," that belief continued into the eleventh-century Middle East. In the first chapter of his book, Sa'id stated that "all the people on earth from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South, although they constitute a single group, differ in three distinct traits: behaviors, physical appearances, and languages."<sup>96</sup> Sa'id outlined the seven original people of the world as the Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Copts, Turks, Indians/Sinds, and Chinese. Sa'id highlighted that Arabs and Jews evolved from the Chaldean people. Sa'id specified two distinct categories of people: those that cultivated science and those that showed no interest in science. Of those that cultivated the sciences, Sa'id listed the Chaldeans, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, and Romans. Although the Arabs, Jews, and Romans evolved later from the original seven nations, he argued that they eventually contributed to the development of knowledge and science. On the other hand, he asserted the Turks, Chinese, Berbers, Bulgarians, and the various groups of black people (whom he identified as Sudanese, Ethiopians, Nubians, Zinjis, and Ghanaians) had no interest in the sciences.

Sa'id argued that black people had no interest in science because their dark skin color attracted the sun. He stated: "[they] are of hot temperament and fiery behavior. They do not have the patience or firmness of perception."<sup>97</sup> He characterized them as "foolish and ignorant."<sup>98</sup> Along with the blacks, Sa'id argued that the Bulgarians and their neighboring people "showed no interest in

---

<sup>96</sup> Sema'an I. Salem and Alok Kumar, *Science in the Medieval World: Book of the Categories of Nations by Sa'id al-Andalusi* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

science [and] resemble animals more than human beings.”<sup>99</sup> He rationalized their cool temperament and rude behavior due to their skin color, which suffered from being too far from the sun. Sa’id claimed, “they were overcome by ignorance and laziness, and infested by fatigue and stupidity.”<sup>100</sup> He stated:

The Jalaliyah [Galicians, Austrians], the Berbers, and the rest of the populations of the western sector... Allah, may He be glorified, has provided with despotism, ignorance, enmity, and violence... Allah provides generously for whomever He chooses and diverts His grace away from whomever He chooses.<sup>101</sup>

It is clear that Sa’id believed the environment played a role in human characteristics. According to Sa’id, all the inhabitants in the Western sector of the world had the same negative qualities. He did not distinguish between groups of people, but categorized them according to region. Sa’id is one of many scholars in the Middle East who discussed the environment’s contribution to human distinctions. Ibn Khaldun, one of the most revered and influential historians of the Middle Ages, dedicated a whole chapter in the *Muqqaddimah* (The Prologue) to the influence of climate on human characteristics and differences. Ibn Khaldun detailed the characteristics of individuals inhabiting what he outlined as the seven zones of the world. He described those living in the middle zones as having “well-proportioned characters and the most temperate in body, color, character qualities, and general condition” than those of the far north and south zones. In his description of those living in the middle zones, Ibn Khaldun stated:

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 8.



They are found to be extremely moderate in their dwellings, clothing, food, stuffs, and crafts. They use houses that are well constructed of stone and embellished by craftsmanship. They rival each other in production of the very best tools and implements...They avoid intemperance quite generally in all their conditions. Such are the inhabitants of the Maghrib, Syria, the two Iraqs, Western India, and China, as well as Spain; also the European Christians nearby, the Galicians, and all of those who live together with these peoples or near them in the three [middle] temperate zones, the Iraq and Syria are directly in the middle and therefore are the most temperate of all these counties.<sup>102</sup>

Similar to Ibn Qutayba and Sa'id, Ibn Khaldun, decades later, expressed the view that the environment and region dictated one's temperament. Ibn Khaldun maintained that even though the inhabitants of the middle zones lacked access to grain and were limited to meat and milk consumption, they were found to be healthier in body and better in character than those with plenty of everything.<sup>103</sup> Ibn Khaldun drew particular attention to their complexions, which he argued were "clearer" in color.<sup>104</sup> With respect to their intellect, he stated "their minds are keener as far as knowledge and perception are concerned."<sup>105</sup>

Through the works of historical figures in the Middle East such as Ibn Qutayba, Sa'id al-Andalusi, and Ibn Khaldun, it is evident that at least into the early modern period, the belief that human differences were a result of the

---

<sup>102</sup> Franz Rosenthal, trans. *Muqaddimah* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1958), 168.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

environment and not biologically innate, unchangeable differences amongst mankind, persisted amongst scholars. There are not many sources beyond the Middle Ages that discuss human differences in the Middle East. However, the debate between the political Islamic activist Jamal al-din “al-Afghani” and Ernest Renan, the nineteenth-century French philosopher, suggests that during the second half of the nineteenth century, intellectual figures in the Middle East still supported the idea that God created man equal and that circumstances determined the advancement of certain groups or races.

In May of 1883, al-Afghani wrote his “Answer to Renan” in response to a lecture by Ernest Renan on “Islam and Science.”<sup>106</sup> At the Sorbonne in March of 1833, Renan had claimed that early Islam and the Arabs were hostile to the scientific and philosophical spirit, and that science had entered into the Islamic world only from non-Arab sources.<sup>107</sup> He claimed that none of the great Islamic philosophers was Arab by birth, and to call their philosophy Arab because they wrote in Arabic was nonsensical.<sup>108</sup> Renan’s argument, as al-Afghani later noted, was characterized by racist undertones in that he assumed Arabs were by nature hostile to science and philosophy.<sup>109</sup> Al-Afghani took particular offense at Renan’s racist innuendos and refuted Renan’s argument by claiming that although Western nations have advanced in the sciences and philosophy, their advancement was not due to their natural ability to acquire knowledge. He stated that all people in their first stages of civilization were incapable of being guided

---

<sup>106</sup> Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 84.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

by pure reason, or of distinguishing good from evil.<sup>110</sup> He adopted an evolutionary view on the history of people and their reasoning capabilities.<sup>111</sup>

What was most surprising to many at the time was al-Afghani's acceptance of the superiority of the modern Western intellectual climate.<sup>112</sup> Rather than refuting the claim that the West was more advanced in science and philosophy, al-Afghani attributed this advancement to the fact that Christianity arrived before Islam and thus the Christian people had a head start.<sup>113</sup> Al-Afghani stated that since "the Christian religion preceded the Muslim religion in the world by many centuries, I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bond and marching resolutely in the path of civilization after the manner of Western society."<sup>114</sup> The argument could be made that al-Afghani's rejection of the idea of the inherent hostile nature of Arabs towards science and philosophy was that of a defense mechanism. Yet, al-Afghani could have attacked the West and made the counter argument that Western societies were inherently backwards. Al-Afghani could have championed the Arab intellectuals of the past, but he refrained from attributing any innate characteristics to Arabs or non-Arabs.

Through his acknowledgment of the advanced state of the Western world and attributing that success to evolutionary processes, al-Afghani's response to Renan demonstrated three things: that he believed all men were created equal as far as their reasoning capabilities are concerned, that theories of evolution

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

were reaching the Middle East during the nineteenth century, and that they were employed by Middle Eastern scholars. Al-Afghani's evolutionary explanation for the advancement of Western knowledge differed from racial theories in the West at the time because he did not argue for innate human characteristics, but rather for the gradual development of societal mental capabilities. Al-Afghani's rebuttal to Renan must be placed in the context of the Darwinism debates that occurred in the Middle East during the second half of the nineteenth century.

### The Darwinism Debate

The debate over Darwinism that began in Arabic newspapers started in 1877, with Rizquallah al-Birbari, an Orthodox-Christian Syrian who was known for his work with Cornelius van Dyck, an American medical missionary who travelled to the Middle East, editing the Beirut children's newspaper, *Kaukab as-Subh al-Munir* (Brilliant Start of the Morning).<sup>115</sup> Al-Birbari submitted a text to *al-Muqtataf*, a scientific review journal, in March 1877, which was published as a three-part continuing essay, but only the second essay was given the title *Fi asl al-insan* (Concerning the Origins of Humans).<sup>116</sup> Al-Birbari first listed for the readers the different theories about the origin of mankind that had been floating around in scientific circles, including the theory that argued that humans descended from apes.<sup>117</sup> Al-Birbari rejected the evolutionary theories and instead referenced biblical passages concerning the creation of man to prove that God

---

<sup>115</sup> Dagmar Glass, *Der Muqtataf und seine Öffentlichkeit: Aufklärung, Rasonnement und Meinungsstreit in der frühen arabischen Zeitschriftenkommunikation* (Wurzburg: Ergon, 2004), 416. Translation provided by Scott Moore.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>117</sup> *al-Muqtataf* I (1877): 231.

created man and that human development was not a product of evolutionary processes.<sup>118</sup>

Although intellectuals discussed theories of evolution as early as 1877, in the years to come, the scientific community entered into intense debates over Darwinism. In 1882, around the same time that al-Afghani wrote his “Answer to Renan,” Ya’qub Sarruf and Faris Nimr, co-editors of *al-Muqtataf*, released the essay, *Taqaddum al-Mararif* (The Progress of Knowledge), which supported Darwinism. That same year, Edwin Lewis, an American instructor at the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), would ignite a major controversy over Darwinism resulting in the loss of his teaching position and the expulsion of many SPC students. At the commencement exercise of 1882 at the SPC, Lewis had read a speech that “smacked of Darwinism.”<sup>119</sup> His speech was titled “Knowledge, Science and Wisdom.”<sup>120</sup> Lewis set out to define each of the three terms and argued that knowledge was a passive state of the mind and science was the active state that contributed to existing knowledge. In order to prove his point, Lewis listed Darwin as an example of someone who contributed to knowledge.<sup>121</sup> The speech resulted in his forced resignation, the resignation of other instructors who supported Lewis, violent student protests, and the suspension of some SPC students, including Jurji Zaydan, who supported Lewis and Darwinism.

It had been a year after Zaydan passed the entrance exams and matriculated at the medical school of the SPC that he and a group of students

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Nadia Farag, “The Lewis Affair and Fortunes of *al-Muqtataf*,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 8 (1972): 74.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 73.

protested the resignation of Dr. Edwin Lewis and demanded freedom of speech at the university. The university suspended the student protestors and only allowed them back after they signed a statement acknowledging their errors; Zaydan refused to sign the statement and instead left for Cairo.<sup>122</sup> During this time, Cairo was a safe haven for intellectual thought. It was during his time in Cairo that Zaydan created the journal *al-Hilal*, which would eventually become a major journal with an extensive readership base around the world. *Al-Hilal* discussed topics such as Islamic history, Western civilizations, language, and most importantly scientific knowledge and current events. Zaydan dedicated a section in his newspaper to “science news,” where he stressed education and knowledge to his readers. Zaydan promoted to his readers the theory of evolution (along with modern science) and argued that they were the key to knowledge and the advancement of all Arabs living around the world. Zaydan continued his interest in Darwinist thought and published various articles on the origin of mankind and racial distinctions. Similar to the debates over Darwinism in *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Hilal* also engaged in the dispute over the origin of man.

#### Jurji Zaydan, *al-Hilal*, and Racial Science

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the prevailing magazines/journals in the Arabic-speaking world were *al-Hilal*, *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Manar* (The Beacon), all published and owned by Syrian immigrants to Egypt. All three magazines served a wide-ranging audience as they provided information on Europe, Arab and Islamic history, and most importantly the

---

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Philipp, “Jurji Zaydan’s role in the Syro-Arab Nahda,” in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers, and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Rutledge, 2011), 84.

modern sciences.<sup>123</sup> The “letters to the editor” section of *al-Hilal* provides the most information regarding the topics that interested the readers of the journal. It also supports the notion that *al-Hilal* had a wide readership beyond Egypt, where it was printed, because many readers submitted questions from all over the Arab world, Latin America, Europe, and the United States. Along with providing information on the issues that perplexed or troubled *al-Hilal* readers, Zaydan’s responses to the letters and his articles in the journal help give insight into his political, social, and cultural views.

Since *al-Hilal*’s inception in 1898 through the early twentieth century, Zaydan engaged in the debate over the origin of mankind and from his response to polygenists, readers of *al-Hilal* had a glimpse into Zaydan’s racial beliefs as well. In his 1912 article titled: “Asl al-insan” (The Origin of Man), the same year he published *Tabaqat al-Umam*, Zaydan began the article with the question: Is the origin of man one or more than one?<sup>124</sup> It is clear from the first paragraph of the article that Zaydan was up to date with current scientific theories in the West. He explained to the reader the current state of scientific debates on the origin of mankind. He stated:

Scientists disagree on the origin of man. Is it one or more than one? Is the chain of living nations, from one or multiple origins? A majority of scientists find the origin of man as one and they have many proofs for this logic. The most important evidence is that people within the different *tabaqat* (classes), *asnaf* (types), and places on earth have no fundamental

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>124</sup> Jurji Zaydan, “Asl al-insan,” *al-Hilal* 20 (1912): 538. All translations from *al-Hilal* are my own.

difference between how they look to indicate that they have different origins.<sup>125</sup>

Although Zaydan argued that there were no fundamental differences in the way that individuals looked, his main aim was to refute the claims of polygenists, who supported the belief that there was more than one human origin, not to argue in favor of racial equality. This is evident towards the end of the article, when Zaydan stressed to his readers that there was “no need to keep bringing up and try to find proof”<sup>126</sup> that otherwise supported more than one origin of man. He argued that “the different nations, despite differences in *tabaqat*, places, and eras descend from the same father.”<sup>127</sup> He wanted to put an end to the polygenesis debate and show his readers his stance on the issue.

Zaydan’s racial theory manifested itself in the same journal article of *al-Hilal*, where he dedicated a section to the “skeletons of humans”; he listed the Dutch scientist, Eugene DuBois and his study on human skeletons and head shapes. DuBois found the remains of what he labeled as an “ape-man” with the head shape between that of a monkey and a human. Zaydan extrapolated from DuBois’ research that because the “ape-man” skeleton had a thumb, it was closer in lineage to a human than an ape.<sup>128</sup>

It is unclear whether Zaydan became aware of Eugene DuBois’ findings on his own or if he came across DuBois in Keane’s *The World’s Peoples*, since he published *Tabaqat al-Umam* the same year and cited Keane’s book directly.

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 539-540.



Regardless of how DuBois' research was transmitted to Zaydan, what is clear is that Zaydan had an interest in anthropology and most importantly, the ranking of human races. After discussing DuBois' skeletal findings in "Asl al-insan," Zaydan also illustrated a tree of racial hierarchy based on skull size. The tree divided the different races and ranked them according to skull size, beginning with "the most prestigious of the Caucasians," who allegedly had a skull size of 1,550 centimeters, followed by the "degenerate nation of people" with a head size of 1,250, and concluding with the human monkey, gorilla, and chimpanzee, whose head sizes range from 200 to 1,000 centimeters.

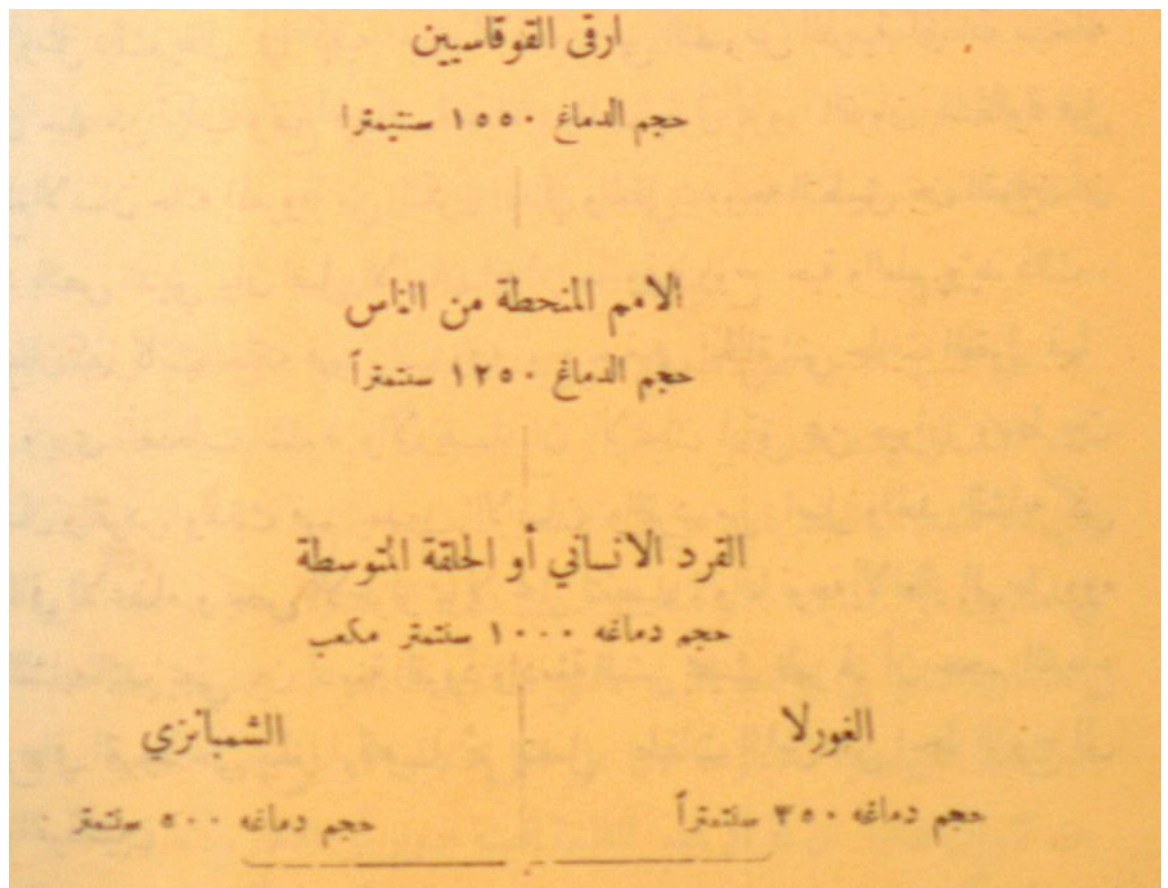


Fig 1. The race tree in "Asl al-insan."

Zaydan did not explain whether he engineered the tree or if he copied it from DuBois, but based on his conclusions in *Tabaqat al-Umam*, which were published that same year as Zaydan's article "Alwan al-bashar" (The Color of Man) and "Asnaf al-bashar" (The Types of Man), it is evident that Zaydan supported the idea of racial hierarchies based on biologically inherent differences. Prior to publishing "Asl al-insan" and *Tabaqat al-Umam*, "Alwan al-bashar" and "Asnaf al-bashar" appeared in *al-Hilal* in 1898 and 1900, respectively. Both articles expressed the idea that there existed different types of man, especially with regards to skin color. The ideas expressed in "Asl al-insan" and "Asnaf al-bashar" indicate that at the end of the nineteenth century, Zaydan supported the idea of biologically driven human difference rather than environmental factors for human distinctions.

Another instance where Zaydan refrained from attributing environmental reasons for human distinction is in his response to an inquiry sent by Mahmud Bik Hamdi al-Saed from Jaffa in 1900. Mahmud posed a series of questions to *al-Hilal* about the differences in human beings. Zaydan responded and pointed out to Mahmud and other *al-Hilal* readers that man originated from one father, but also indicated the differences in color, body type, features, and language that existed between the people of the world. He listed an example of the people of *Wadi al-Nile* (the Valley of the Nile), whose population did not consist of only those originally from the ancient Nile region, but also from Asia, particularly the

“Caucasus” area.<sup>129</sup> According to Zaydan, the people of *Wadi al-Nile* had migrated from Asia, which explained why they had different features from their neighbors in the Nuba region (mountain region of present-day Sudan). The response to Mahmud does not mention the biologically inherent differences among man, yet Zaydan shied away from crediting the environment as the sole reason for differences in skin color, even though it is clear that Middle Eastern scholars applied that logic in the past.

Mahmud’s question to Zaydan indicates the popular beliefs about human differences that existed in the Middle East at that time. When Mahmud inquired what the reasons were for the differences among human beings, particularly the “differences in height, weakness, strength, traditions, behaviors, taste, and dialect of the different languages,” he demonstrated knowledge about the environmental explanations for human skin color and physical features. He stated, “it could be said the reason is the difference in regional weather--hot and cold, but if we follow the equator at forty degrees, which includes the United States, Spain, Greece, Anatolia, the Caucus, China, and Japan...we do not see the people across these lines having the same body, color, or look.” In reference to the Arab nations he asked why the Ethiopians, whose “kingdom” was towards Arab nations, still have darker skin than other inhabitants of Arab nations.<sup>130</sup> He also questioned why Somalis, whom he described as “tan” were less dark than their Sudanese neighbors.<sup>131</sup> Of particular interest to Mahmud was why Native Americans in the United States were red in color, unlike the whites that lived

---

<sup>129</sup> Jurji Zaydan, “Asnaf al-bashar,” *al-Hilal* 9 (1900): 50-51.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

among them.<sup>132</sup> What perplexed Mahmud the most were the “differences of accents in the same nation in the same region” along with the “differences in skin color for human faces.” He inquired into the reason for the different skin colors: white, yellow, red, and bronze.”<sup>133</sup> Mahmud’s interest in the disparities in skin color was an early sign of the doubt cast on previous Middle Eastern theories of environmental influences on racial differences.

In response to an inquiry, Zaydan published “Alwan al-bashar.” It addressed the interest in skin color and the origin of man more generally, and explained that differences were explicable in terms of biologically innate qualities in the Middle East. When Mustafa Effendi Sabri Yusbashi, a police officer from Halfa, Sudan wrote in to *al-Hilal* in 1898, he asked a question that elicited a detailed response from Zaydan. Mustafa Effendi inquired as to whether there was a difference in the construction of the body parts between the different types of people, particularly those with white and black skin.<sup>134</sup> Zaydan responded there was no difference in the bone structure of different races, but in fact, the differences in skin color were contingent on the colored substance in the blood stream of the cells on the surface of the skin.<sup>135</sup> Zaydan held that if the skin were to be peeled off a black and white man, there would be no difference in the bone structure, except for the form of the skull.<sup>136</sup> He continued to explain that the substance in the deep layer of the skin for *Zinjis* (blacks) is black, while for white people it is white, for tan people tan, and so on.

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Jurji Zaydan, “Asnaf al-bashar,” *al-Hilal* 9 (1900): 50-51.

<sup>134</sup> Jurji Zaydan, “Alwan al-bashar,” *al-Hilal* 6 (1898): 621.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 621-623.

Zaydan's starting point was for the origin of man as one, and over time as readers asked questions pertaining to racial classifications, Zaydan's racial theory manifested itself. Even when Zaydan explained to his reader, Mustafa Effendi, that the bone structure of each human was the same, he still maintained that the skull size of different people differed along with the substance in their blood, which dictated their skin color. By 1912, Zaydan revealed the culmination of his racial theory in *Tabaqat al-Umam*.

### *Tabaqat al-Umam*

*Tabaqat al-Umam* consisted of two hundred and seventy-eight pages of information pertaining to Zaydan's global racial hierarchy. In the text's introduction, Zaydan described to the readers the purpose of his study and how he came to his conclusions. The book began by claiming that since the beginning of time, human beings have found interest in the different cultures and behaviors of people. Zaydan stated that, "due to the limitations of transportation and communication in ancient societies, knowledge in the past has been limited to one's neighbors and relatives."<sup>137</sup> Zaydan listed Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, as one of the great men who travelled the world in order to describe the different nations. Zaydan also emphasized the contributions made by Arab intellectuals to his discussion on the different cultures of the world, including Ibn Fadlan, the tenth-century Arab traveller, and Ibn Battuta, the fourteenth-century explorer and geographer. Even though Zaydan mentioned the accomplishments of Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, he extolled the achievements of the

---

<sup>137</sup> Jurji Zaydan, *Tabaqat al-Umam aw al-sala'il al-bashariyya* (al-Flaja, Egypt: Matba'a al-Hilal, 1912), 3.

Arabs and argued that “they learned more than anyone before them” about the different people of the world.<sup>138</sup> Zaydan referenced Sa’id al-Andalusi and described his study as “important,” but “lacking” since it only included the “scientific achievements” of the different groups of people and not their “history or language.”<sup>139</sup> Zaydan also argued for the originality of his own book in that it was based on the “modern sciences” particularly “ethnology,” which he labeled as a “branch of anthropology.”<sup>140</sup> Unlike previous studies that focused on “myths” and “exaggerations,” Zaydan’s study used the “natural sciences, observation, and research.”<sup>141</sup>

According to Zaydan, a new text that described the races of the world was needed because few previous studies focused on the “savage” populations of the world, and if they did, they exaggerated their descriptions. For example, he mentions an Arab traveller who described those he engaged in battle with as beasts who had “six arms each,” that resembled “human turtles.”<sup>142</sup> Zaydan argued that another need for his study was that technology had allowed people to travel to “Africa, America, India,” etc., and for that reason, there needed to be a text that compiled all the observations made by travellers to the “five continents.” Because *Tabaqat al-Umam* described the behaviors, features, mental characteristics, habits, religion, and body types of the different human groupings, Zaydan argued for the book’s contribution to the principles of the

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 4.

“philosophy of history.”<sup>143</sup> Along with the descriptions of the different human races, Zaydan stated that *Tabaqat al-Umam* was written with both the principles of “science and sociology” and the research provided by Westerners since the early nineteenth century to explain the “downfall or success” of certain groups of people.<sup>144</sup>

The subjects of *Tabaqat al-Umam* were the different human races, but Zaydan also discussed geography and dedicated a section to the geological origin of the human being and human history before Christ. Zaydan stated:

[This book] describes how human beings gradually developed from eating food provided by the land to creating their own bread and cooking their own meat. Also, how man left his cave and built houses and castles, and went from wearing the leaf of trees or leather to creating textiles and wearing clothes. And how [human] speech evolved from sounds to a developed language.<sup>145</sup>

*Tabaqat al-Umam* began with a description of the lowest race, the *Zunuj*, or the black race, who Zaydan described as the “degenerate” human race, followed by the Mongolian or yellow race, the Native American or red race, and the Caucasian or white race. The Caucasians were described as the best of all the races. Zaydan listed the mental and physical features of each race. For example, he argued that the Mongolian race, which originated from Tibet, had “wide heads, high cheekbones, protruding jaws, short noses, little hair on the chin, and small

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 6.

black eyes.”<sup>146</sup> He defined the Mongolian personality as “lacking emotion” and “stubborn” in nature. Unlike the Native American or red race, which he argued, was “aggressive and robust.”

Zaydan attributed the best characteristics to the Caucasian race, which he divided into three categories based on region: Northern, Middle, and Southern. He stressed that all Caucasians were the most knowledgeable and industrious and possessed the most “literature and poetry” of all races. However, he held that the Southern Caucasians, who inhabited Southern Europe and the Arab world, were “moody” and “lazy”<sup>147</sup> unlike their counterparts in Northern Europe.

#### Contextualizing Jurji Zaydan

To understand *Tabaqat al-Umam*'s contribution to racial thinking in the Middle East, Zaydan must be placed in the context of Arab nationalism and the *Nahda* period. According to historian Ismail Serageldin, during the *Nahda*, four strands of transformation and transition occurred in the Arab world: the admiration for European achievements that promoted emulation of the West, an insistence on reviving the roots of the culture of the East, a determination on a pan-Islamic revival as demonstrated by al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh, and Rashid Rida, and lastly, those who wanted only an Arab revival.<sup>148</sup> *Tabaqat al-Umam* is a prime example of how Zaydan championed Arab and Islamic history while also promoting Western ideas. For example, although he glorified the Arab-Muslim travellers, such as Ibn Fadlan and Ibn Battuta, he also highlighted the

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>148</sup> Ismail Serageldin, “Jurji Zaidan: His Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature” (On the occasion of the conference held at The Library of Congress on Jurji Zaidan’s Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature, Washington DC, June 5, 2012).



limitations of their studies. In other instances, he categorized the Arabs as part of the Caucasian race, the supreme race in his opinion, while also making his admiration for the West evident by attributing the whitest skin color and “the calmest, most patient, and most determined”<sup>149</sup> personalities to the Northern Europeans. *Tabaqat al-Umam* can be viewed as an attempt by Zaydan to educate the Arabic-speaking people about racial hierarchies, but also a means of conveying Western knowledge in a way that supported Arab pride. Zaydan believed *Tabaqat al-Umam* would serve an educational purpose for his readers, many of whom did not have any exposure to any Western racial theory. In the introduction, he stated that he collected his research based on Western anthropological texts, but elaborated on certain topics that were “suitable” for the Arabic-speaking people.<sup>150</sup> The topics Zaydan engaged with the most in *Tabaqat al-Umam* were the different races, particularly the Caucasian race, the origin of man, and the origin of the Semitic peoples. *Tabaqat al-Umam* was indeed “suitable” for the Arabic-speaking people in the United States who had just engaged in a campaign to prove their Caucasian racial status to the United States naturalization courts.

---

<sup>149</sup> Zaydan, *Tabaqat al-Umam*, 219.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

## Chapter 5: Race Across Borders

Since the first of July, Asiatics, what-ever their ethnologic strain, have not been considered "free white persons" by the authorities on naturalization at Washington. Members of Caucasian or Aryan stock such as the Syrian, the Persian, the Armenian, the Afghan, and the Hindu, may prove that their blood is the same as that in the veins of the German or the Englishman, or the Yankee...

*The New York Times* (1909)

In 1914, Mahmud Effendi Sulayman Bu Karam, a Syrian-Muslim<sup>151</sup> wrote to *al-Hilal* from Little Rock, Arkansas, inquiring whether Phoenicians were of Semitic origin.<sup>152</sup> Jurji Zaydan responded: "Scholars today consider the Phoenicians as Semites like their brothers the Arabs, Chaldeans, Babylonians, Hebrews, and Armenians."<sup>153</sup> Mahmud Effendi's inquiry indicates that Syrian immigrants in the United States turned to Zaydan for his expertise on racial classifications during the height of their struggle for American citizenship. It also demonstrates that Muslim-Syrian immigrants in the United States wanted to learn the origin of their Phoenician ancestors. This suggests that Phoenicianism in the United States did not take on the same form as it did in the Middle East, since it did not exclusively appeal to Christian-Syrians.

---

<sup>151</sup> The name Mahmud is a derivative of the Muslim name Muhammad. It is assumed that an individual with the name Mahmud adheres to Islam or at the very least was born into a Muslim family.

<sup>152</sup> Jurji Zaydan, "The Phoenician Semites," *al-Hilal* 22 (1914): 705.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

Zaydan's response shows that while he published articles in *al-Hilal* on racial science, along with *Tabaqat al-Umam*, based on what he considered objective, scientific knowledge, he still desired to unite the Arabic-speaking people through a common lineage, language, and history, as was typical of the efforts of most Arab nationalists in the early twentieth century. Zaydan differed from other Arab nationalists in that he did not completely dismiss Syrian links to the ancient Phoenicians, but grouped the ancient Phoenicians as Semites, similar to their "brothers," the Arabs. Most importantly, the communication between Syrian immigrants in the United States and Zaydan symbolizes the transnational nature of the Syrian diaspora in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Syrians in the United States wrote to Zaydan for information on different topics, Zaydan stayed in tune with their developments, especially when it came to their racial status. Syrian immigrants not only learned about their racial origins from Zaydan, but their naturalization cases inspired Zaydan's racial ideology as well. Most importantly, evidence suggests that Zaydan wrote *Tabaqat al-Umam* to gain credibility in Western intellectual circles and to support the Syrian citizenship campaign in the United States.

#### Jurji Zaydan and *The World's Peoples*

When Augustus Henry Keane, an Irish journalist and linguist, published *The World's Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions* in 1908, he, like many other European scholars of his time, strayed away from previous religious and environmental explanations for the differences in mankind, proposing scientific

and anthropological claims to his racial classifications. Keane wrote his treatise on the different groups of humans at a time when intellectuals all over the world debated the origin of mankind. In response to polygenists, who held that there were several distinct human species with no common ancestor, Keane argued that the “various divisions of mankind are really blood relations, branches of one parent stem, members of a single human family, which had its origin in one primeval home.”<sup>154</sup> He located the “human cradle” of civilization on the island of Java, located off the coast of Indonesia, where Dr. Eugene Dubois, a Dutch paleoanthropologist, had discovered the first remains of an “ape-man that could walk.”<sup>155</sup> After specifying the origin of the human species, Keane listed and categorized the various races based on their physical and mental characteristics. He ranked mankind into four racial groups beginning from “low” to “high”: Negro, Yellow, Red, and White. He explained that these four main divisions evolved independently in several distinct zones.<sup>156</sup> It is important to note that in his description of the different human groupings, he listed each one according to its religion, speech, mental features, and most significantly, its physical appearance, particularly its head shape.

Similar to Keane, the British biologist George Thomas Bettany wrote *The World's Inhabitants or Mankind, Animals, or Plants* in 1888, and detailed the differences among humans. Basing his criteria on the proportions of individual skulls, he described those with “long-heads” as having a proportion of skull

---

<sup>154</sup> Augustus Henry Keane, *The World's Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1908), 1.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

breadth-to- length of seventy-four or less, “middle-headed” people from seventy-five to eighty and “short or round headed” persons above eighty.<sup>157</sup> Along with skull shape, Bettany placed emphasis on the projection of the jaw. Some races, he argued, such as the “Bushman” and other Africans, have very forward-projecting jaws, similar to those of the “higher apes,” while the more “elevated races” have jaws almost vertically placed beneath their foreheads.<sup>158</sup> Bettany referenced the racial classification of Blumenbach, the German anthropologist who had categorized human races into five groups. However, Bettany stressed that Blumenbach’s arrangement did not include all of the races known by the end of the nineteenth century, such as the Arabs, who according to Bettany, originated from white men.<sup>159</sup> Bettany listed the different races in Asia as primarily Mongoloid, along with some Caucasian Arabs who he stated inhabited Arabia, Palestine, Asia Minor, Persia, and India.<sup>160</sup> In more detail than Bettany’s classification of the Arabs, Keane listed them as encompassing “the Syrians, Maronites, Druzes and Ansireh [?].”<sup>161</sup>

Scholar Marie Louise Pratt, in her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, discusses how travel writing and ethnological studies about non- Europeans by Europeans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave the European reading public entitlement to and familiarity with distant parts

---

<sup>157</sup> George Thomas Bettany, *The World’s Inhabitants or Mankind, Animals, and Plants: Being a Popular Account of the Races and Nations of Mankind, Past and Present, and the Animals and Plants Inhabiting the Great Continents and Principal Islands* (London and New York: Ward Lock & Co., 1888), 6.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>161</sup> Keane, *The World’s Peoples*, 307.

of the world that were being “explored, invaded, invested, and colonized.”<sup>162</sup> Travel narratives and ethnologies such as *The World’s Inhabitants* and *The World’s Peoples* were important not only because they made Europeans feel “at home” in other parts of the world, but because they represented the shift towards inherent biological explanations for racial distinctions, and most importantly, because these books reached far beyond Europe and into the consciousness of the peoples they discussed. For example, when Jurji Zaydan published *Tabaqat al-Umam*, he based most of his research on Keane’s *The World’s Peoples*, along with Bettany’s *The World’s Inhabitants*. *Tabaqat al-Umam* symbolized the production of concrete classifications of race in the Middle East by an Ottoman Syrian scholar. Zaydan’s conclusions were novel in the Arab world in that he argued for the superiority of the Arabs because of their biologically Caucasian origin. Although similar to other Arab nationalists, he touted Arab cultural achievements.

Jurji Zaydan was a participant in the *Nahda* in that he belonged to a new Arab intellectual elite whose education was not based on traditional forms of knowledge and who debated new world views, particularly of science and modernity.<sup>163</sup> Similar to other contributors to the *Nahda*, Zaydan concurred with the idea that scientific knowledge and education were the keys to progress for the Arab people. It is evident through many of his novels and short stories, which championed the achievements of the Arabs, that Zaydan took pride in the history

---

<sup>162</sup> Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas Philipp, “Jurji Zaydan’s role in the Syro-Arab Nahda,” in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers, and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Rutledge, 2011), 79.

of the Arabs. However, through his beliefs on race and the hierarchies of man, it is also clear that the West influenced much of his world-view.

The Prerequisite Cases, Jurji Zaydan, and *The World's Peoples*

Dow and the SAA's arguments concerning their Semitic origin, great ancestors, and contributions to the world did not impress Judge Smith, who had heard Dow's first two petitions. In Dow's third petition in 1915, the judge finally granted him citizenship. However, he did not focus on the contributions made by Dow's racial predecessors, the ancient Phoenicians; rather he considered the scientific evidence that supported Dow's Caucasian status. The judge's logic for awarding Dow citizenship was not uncommon during the first quarter of the twentieth century, especially when it came to the Syrian prerequisite cases. In three out of the four cases where naturalization courts awarded Syrian immigrants citizenship, the judges referenced Keane's *The World's Peoples* as justification for their racial inclusion.

Another instance where a judge cited *The World's Peoples* is the 1909 naturalization case of George Costa Najour. Upon granting Najour the right to naturalize, South Carolina District Judge Newman stated:

...I consider the Syrians as belonging to what we recognize and what the world recognizes, as the white race. The applicant comes from Mount Lebanon, near Beirut. He is not particularly dark, and has none of the characteristics or appearance of the Mongolian race, but so far as I can

see and judge, has the appearance and characteristics of the Caucasian race.<sup>164</sup>

The judge acknowledged the Caucasian appearance of the applicant and continued to provide what he believed were logical explanations why the courts should accept Syrians as Caucasians and thus grant them citizenship, asserting that *The World's Peoples* “unhesitatingly places the Syrians in the Caucasian or white division”<sup>165</sup> of the world. The judge stated: “I have before me now, *The World's Peoples*, by Dr. A.H. Keane, [who] classifies, without question or qualification in any way, Syrians as part of the Caucasian or white race and this they are, so far as my knowledge and information goes.”<sup>166</sup> The following year, another case surfaced involving Tom Ellis, a Syrian immigrant living in Oregon who petitioned the naturalization courts for citizenship. District Judge Wolverton accepted Ellis’ application and claimed, “No contention [was] made by the naturalization officers of the United States that Syrians do not belong to the white race.”<sup>167</sup> He also referenced *The World's Peoples* and maintained that “ethnologically, [Syrians] are of the Semitic stock, a markedly white type of the race.”<sup>168</sup>

In the three naturalization cases where *The World's Peoples* was the foundation for racial knowledge, the judges granted Syrian immigrants the right to citizenship based on their Caucasian status. When Judge Newman attested to the right of George Najour to naturalize, he stated that he had “before him” *The*

---

<sup>164</sup> In Re Najour, 174 F.735, N.D. Ga., (1909).

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> In Re Ellis, 179 F. 1002, D. Or., (1910).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.



*World's Peoples*. How Judge Newman came across this book is unknown. Keane spent some time teaching in the United States, and Haney Lopez describes his book as a “prominent anthropological text” at the time.<sup>169</sup> One possible explanation is that George Najour came prepared with the text in hand, since it supported the Caucasian status of Syrians, but it is more likely that Judge Newman discovered it on his own since American judges presiding over the different naturalization cases commonly turned to anthropological texts to validate an applicant’s racial status.<sup>170</sup>

Even though Zaydan cited *The World's Peoples* in *Tabaqat al-Umam*, George Najour and Tom Ellis could not have learned of it from Zaydan’s text because *Tabaqat al-Umam* was not published until 1912, and their cases occurred in 1909 and 1910. The only other reference Zaydan made to Keane’s findings is in the *al-Hilal* article “Asl al-insan,” which was published the same year as *Tabaqat al-Umam*. Evidence suggests that Zaydan himself came across *The World's Peoples* by way of the Syrian prerequisite cases, where he learned of the value of the text and its importance for racial theory in the United States. Communication between Zaydan and his readers in the United States is made evident by a comment sent to *al-Hilal* in 1901 from Greenfield, North Carolina.

---

<sup>169</sup> Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 50.

<sup>170</sup> For example, a Hawaiian living in Utah petitioned for naturalization in 1889 and was denied citizenship on the grounds that he was not white. The judge hearing the case listed many anthropological studies that discussed race in order to justify rejecting the Hawaiian immigrant. See: *In re Kanaka Nian*, [http://campus.westlaw.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/find/default.wl?cite=21+Pac.+993&rs=WLW13.04&vr=2.0&rp=%2ffind%2fdefault.wl&spa=003372414-2000&fn=\\_top&mt=CampusLaw&sv=Full](http://campus.westlaw.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/find/default.wl?cite=21+Pac.+993&rs=WLW13.04&vr=2.0&rp=%2ffind%2fdefault.wl&spa=003372414-2000&fn=_top&mt=CampusLaw&sv=Full).

Mulhim Halim Abduh wrote in to the journal, asserting that Phoenicians were the first Caucasians to land in America.<sup>171</sup> Mulhim's comment was in line with later claims made by Syrian Americans during their citizenship campaign and it can be extrapolated that the early Syrian Americans continued to communicate with Zaydan on issues of race in the United States between 1901 and 1912.

Two inquiries sent in 1914 provide evidence that *al-Hilal* readers, along with Zaydan, were aware of the citizenship crisis among the Syrian-American community. Zaydan's response to one of the inquiries demonstrates his attempt to unite different parts of the Middle East through race. In the first inquiry, an *al-Hilal* reader from London, England, asked whether Egyptians were Caucasians or "colored."<sup>172</sup> Zaydan responded that Egyptians are considered Caucasians and that there are two types: white and red.<sup>173</sup> He then referred the reader to his book, *Tabaqat al-Umam*. On the previous page of *al-Hilal*, Iskander Effendi from Beirut expressed concern over the troubles of the Syrians in America. He wrote: "I have heard that the United States of America does not consider the Syrians as part of the white or Caucasian people, whom they authorize to enter their country, and the Syrians have attempted to set [right] the wrong of the Americans."<sup>174</sup>

Due to Zaydan's affinity for Western knowledge, it is not unexpected that he incorporated Keane's ideology into his own racial hierarchy. However, why did he draw from *The World's Peoples* when there were so many other popular

---

<sup>171</sup> Jurji Zaydan, "The Origin of the Indian and Arabs in America," *al-Hilal* 9 (1901): 536-541.

<sup>172</sup> Jurji Zaydan, "The Egyptians and the Colored People," *al-Hilal* 22 (1914): 461.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Jurji Zaydan, "The Syrians in America," *al-Hilal* 22 (1914): 460.

books on race at the time? Zaydan could have used information provided in Daniel Brinton's *Race and Peoples*, Joseph Deniker's *Races of Man*, or William Ripley's *The Races of Europe*, to name a few.<sup>175</sup> The simplest explanation is that these books focused primarily on European races, with scant discussion of Syrians or Arabs. On another level, Zaydan argued that race was biological, while theorists like William Ripley offered many non-biological explanations for the differences in mankind. Zaydan concentrated on integrating Keane's *The World's Peoples* and Bettany's *The World's Inhabitants* into *Tabaqat al-Umam* because both classified Syrians, along with other Arabs, as part of the Caucasian race. After all, one of Zaydan's life goals was to unite the Arabic-speaking peoples of the world, and what better way to do so than through racial constructs?

Another conceivable motive for using *The World's Peoples* was that citing a work already recognized as authoritative, as demonstrated by its successful use in the United States naturalization courts, lent reliability to his racial theories. Integrating the information provided in *The World's Peoples* undoubtedly gave Zaydan the credibility he needed, especially since it was one of the foremost texts used to determine race in the Syrian prerequisite cases.

When George Dow had approached the South Carolina naturalization court for the second time in 1914 and argued that he was a Semite and that the

---

<sup>175</sup> The popular texts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on race included Daniel Brinton, *Race and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography* (New York: N.D.C. Hodges, 1890); Joseph Deniker, *The Races of Man: An Outline of Anthropology and Ethnography* (London: W. Scott, 1900); and William Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (New York: D. Appelton and Company, 1899).

Jewish and Christian people owed their religion to the Syrians, the court denied his request. Upon denying him citizenship, the judge stated:

Let it be claimed in the argument for the applicant that Christ appeared in the form of a Jew and spoke a Semitic language. The apostrophic utterance that He cannot be supposed to have clothed His Divinity in the body of one of a race that an American Congress would not admit to citizenship is purely emotional and without logical sequence. The test imposed by Congress is not a religious one. The matter regulated is a purely secular domestic one.<sup>176</sup>

The judge was not impressed with the religious argument presented by the applicant because he believed an applicant's religious affiliation irrelevant to the right to citizenship. In another case in South Carolina in 1913, involving Faras Shahid, the district judge denied the applicant citizenship for a similar reason and asserted:

That such a construction [that] would exclude persons coming from the very cradle of the Jewish and Christian religions, as professed by the nations of Europe whose descendants form the great bulk of citizens of the United States, is unworthy of consideration. Such arguments are of the emotional ad captandum order, that have no place in judicial interpretation of a statute.<sup>177</sup>

Even though the judges in both cases denied the salience of religion in the naturalization process, image and reputation played a role in deeming who was

---

<sup>176</sup> In Re Dow, 213 F. 355, E.D.S.C., (1914).

<sup>177</sup> Ex Parte Shahid, 205 F. 812. E.D.S.C., (1913).

worthy of citizenship. While religion may not have directly helped an immigrant attain citizenship, affiliating with a “foreign” religion could have harmed an immigrant’s image and reputation, and thus hinder their ability to naturalize. For that reason, Syrian immigrants employed religious and scientific rationales to argue their right to naturalize.

### Caucasian or White?

Of utmost importance is the terminology Zaydan employed in *Tabaqat al-Umam* to describe the different races. As shown in his response to the inquiry sent to *al-Hilal* regarding Egyptians, Zaydan held that races could include people of more than one color; he claimed, for example, that Caucasians could have either white or red skin. In *Tabaqat al-Umam*, Zaydan used the same logic, describing the “fourth class of the human race” as the “Caucasian or white race.”<sup>178</sup> These two terms are often used interchangeably in current American society, but during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American naturalization courts were still trying to distinguish precisely who was Caucasian and who was white. This determined who exactly was entitled to naturalization, since the 1790 Naturalization Act extended citizenship to “free white persons,” without stating exactly whom these included.

Historian Haney Lopez shows that, although naturalization courts offered many different rationales to justify the various racial divisions, two prevailed: common knowledge and scientific evidence.<sup>179</sup> Common knowledge referred to

---

<sup>178</sup> Jurji Zaydan, *Tabaqat al-Umam aw al-sala'il al-bashariyya* (al-Flaja, Egypt: Matba'a al-Hilal, 1912), 218.

<sup>179</sup> Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 5.

generally held views on one race or another. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, presented supposedly objective, technical, and specialized racial data.<sup>180</sup> These were the two core approaches the courts used to determine whether an individual was racially suitable for citizenship.

In some of the prerequisite cases, both common knowledge and scientific evidence justified an immigrant's right to naturalize. However, in many others, the issue extended beyond common knowledge and scientific evidence into the realm of whether an immigrant was Caucasian or white, and whether the two terms meant the same thing. During Faras Shahid's naturalization, the presiding judge found it absurd and inconsistent that a "very dark brown, almost black, inhabitant of India" be ranked as a white person "because of a possible or hypothetical infusion of white blood thirty or forty centuries old."<sup>181</sup> He asked, "Who is a free white person?"<sup>182</sup> The judge continued to question the word Caucasian and stated:

The term 'Caucasian' obtained much currency in the pro and anti slavery discussions between 1830 and 1860, but later and more discriminating examination and analysis [sic] has shown its entire inapplicability as denoting the families or stocks inhabiting Europe and speaking either the so-called Aryan or Semitic languages.<sup>183</sup>

In Tom Ellis' case, the judge did not question the usage of the term "Caucasian," but employed it alongside the term "white." He maintained that the phrase "free

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ex parte Shahid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

white persons” used “white” in its popular context to denote Caucasians.<sup>184</sup> Since “the applicant [was] a member of what is known as the white or Caucasian race,”<sup>185</sup> the judge decided in his favor.

Aside from the confusion regarding whether “white” and “Caucasian” shared the same connotation, there was confusion around who was considered white. In Dow’s first petition, the judge stated in reference to the 1790 Naturalization Act that

[a]t first reading the term ‘white’ denotes color. Construed literally the statutes might be interpreted to mean such a person as under the ocular inspection of the court seemed to be white in color. What standard of white is the judge to adopt? The clear white of a Scandinavian, or the swarthy olive or brown of a person from the south of Portugal?<sup>186</sup>

The inconsistencies between the terms are made clear in the same case, when the judge stated:

Most of the courts in this country that have attempted to deal with the question have referred to the white race as the ‘Caucasian’ race, and said that a member of the Caucasian race was entitled to be naturalized without regard to complexion. Very few agree as to what peoples are members of the Caucasian race...<sup>187</sup>

The judges’ rhetoric in the prerequisite cases demonstrates that who was considered white depended on common knowledge, while who was Caucasian

---

<sup>184</sup> In Re Ellis.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> In Re Dow.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

was contingent upon scientific evidence. Had Zaydan been concerned only with the scientific aspects of race, he would have used the term “Caucasian” alone to describe the “fourth class of the human race,” not both “Caucasian or white.”

#### Zaydan’s Support of Syrian Americans

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Tabaqat al-Umam* is its ability to blend science with popular beliefs about certain groups of individuals at the time to dictate their position in Zaydan’s racial hierarchy. Zaydan often portrayed the Arabs in a contradictory manner. For example, he emphasized their “moody” and “lazy” nature but also illustrated their unique position in history. His most tactful declaration in *Tabaqat al-Umam* was that the Semites, from whom the Caucasian race originated, first came from North Africa. This was Zaydan’s attempt to unite all Arabic-speaking peoples under the same racial category, including North Africans, who some Arabs deemed as different. Zaydan also claimed that the Caucasian race was divided into the Semitic and Aryan peoples once the first Caucasians migrated from North Africa to Asia and Europe. Zaydan’s treatment of the Semitic Wave Theory in *Tabaqat al-Umam* raises many issues. He declared that after the original Caucasians migrated to Asia, they became the Semitic race. He refuted scholars who maintained that the first Caucasians migrated to the Arabian Peninsula—which at that time was devoid of any residents—settled there, and eventually dispersed to the remaining parts of Asia, including the Fertile Crescent.<sup>188</sup> Zaydan was not explicit in his disagreement

---

<sup>188</sup> Many present-day scholars and archeologists locate northern Arabia as the home of the first Semites. Archeologist Aminhai Mazar discusses the dispersal of the first Semites from northern Arabia to the Near East in greater detail in his book, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Others have argued for Mesopotamia as the



with the Semitic Wave Theory, but did imply that it was flawed and that it was more logical for the first Caucasians to have migrated to Syria and its neighboring regions and then to have dispersed to the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>189</sup> He then stated that, nevertheless, Semites settled in the Arabian Peninsula, in the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates, as well as in Syria and Ethiopia. A possible explanation for Zaydan's dismissal of the origin of the Semitic people in the Arabian Peninsula was his attempt to unite the Arab world. In his response in 1914 to Mahmud from Little Rock, he claimed Phoenicians were Semites just like the Arabs. That also indicates his desire to group all the people from Greater Syria under the Semitic subgroup. Regardless of where Zaydan argued the Semites originated, Syrian Americans embraced the claim that they were Semites.

Throughout *Tabaqat al-Umam*, Zaydan combined theories from various sources, even though most of his conclusions were based on *The World's Peoples*. Because his text was meant to appeal to the Arabic-speaking peoples, he was selective of the theories he included in each chapter. An instance where he introduced content that differed from Keane was in his treatment of the dispersal of the original Semites. It is probable that Dow and the SAA compiled elements for their argument in their second petition from *Tabaqat al-Umam* because they asserted that they were Semites and that Christians owed their religion to the Syrians. Dow and the SAA could have meant that because the Semitic peoples, who included Jesus (Palestine at the time was part of Greater

---

home of the original Semites. However, this appears to be a minority opinion.

<sup>189</sup> Zaydan, *Tabaqat al-Umam*, 230-233.

Syria), originated from Syria, that the Christians owed their religion to them. If that is what Dow and the SAA intended, it is conceivable that they obtained that information from *Tabaqat al-Umam*, because Zaydan claimed that Semites originated from the Fertile Crescent.

With regards to why Zaydan argued that the Caucasian peoples originated from North Africa, the simplest explanation is that he adopted the theory from Keane, who also proposed it as their place of origin. However, Zaydan wrote the book during his time in Egypt, and although Pharaonism did not gain prominence until the 1920s, perhaps its early signs troubled Zaydan, who in return tried to unite the Egyptians under the Caucasian title, to place them in the same racial category as the Arabs. He may have also claimed the Caucasian origin in North Africa out of Arab pride, but since Zaydan had no qualms mentioning what he perceived as the negative qualities of the Arabs earlier in his text, that could not have been his sole purpose. While locating the origin of the first Caucasians in North Africa alone does not indicate his support of the Syrian-American campaign, it takes on greater weight when coupled with his argument that the Semitic peoples originated from ancient Syria. Even during their campaign for citizenship, Syrians in the United States wrote to Zaydan inquiring about their racial origin. Through *Tabaqat al-Umam*, Zaydan attempted to give Syrian Americans evidence of their Caucasian and Semitic roots, and in turn they used his theories in Dow's second naturalization petition.

Another instance that suggests Syrian Americans learned of race from *Tabaqat al-Umam* is during Dow's second petition. The judge refuted other

claims, especially the assertion made by Dow and the SAA that Arabic was a Semitic language. Judge Smith stated:

The applicant and his friends claim among other grounds to be Semites because they speak a so-called Semitic language, viz., Arabic...their language is still a mystery, but from their sculptured representations and the few proper names that survive in other languages, and their pictured representations on extant sculptures, they are generally supposed to have been non-Semitic, possibly a Mongolian race.<sup>190</sup>

The judge later claimed that Dow's naturalization case had nothing to do with religion, however, he still focused on the Semitic claim and stated, "A Syrian not only would not appear to be of the Caucasian race, but it does not appear clear that he is of a Semitic race."<sup>191</sup>

It is not a coincidence that Zaydan listed Arabic as one of the Semitic languages in *Tabaqat al-Umam*. He first claimed that Arabic originated from another language, which was the root of the Semitic "tongue." He then argued that the divergence between Arabic and the first Semitic language was less than 3,000 years, unlike "English and its Germanic origin."<sup>192</sup> Since Zaydan could have compared Arabic to any language, why did he choose English in particular? It cannot be assumed that because Zaydan wrote *Tabaqat al-Umam* in Egypt, while it was under British colonization, he chose English for this reason. In his introduction, Zaydan stated that he wrote the text for the "Arabic-speaking" peoples, which indicated an intended global audience. After comparing Arabic to

---

<sup>190</sup> In Re Dow.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Zaydan, *Tabaqat al-Umam*, 232.

English, he argued that the structure of Arabic has not changed since its inception, making it a pure and unadulterated Semitic language.

Once Zaydan claimed the Caucasians originated from North Africa, he described the current Arab nations as Semitic, and hence part of the Caucasian race, which he believed was evident through their physical features, especially their “oval face, rectangular head, and sharp chin.”<sup>193</sup> He did, however, label them as “shorter than the average Caucasian” since their height averaged less than “six feet.” In each chapter on the different races, Zaydan used photos of individuals as examples. Under the subheading of “the Semites” he presented pictures of modern types of the race: a Syro-Lebanese Maronite, a Muslim-Egyptian, and two boys from Yemen.



Fig 2. Yusuf Karam, a Syro-Lebanese Maronite.

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 233-235.



Figure 3. Mustafa Kamil, a Muslim-Egyptian



Fig 4. Two Boys from Yemen.

Similar to Zaydan, Keane also dedicated a section of *The World's Peoples* to the Semites and provided photographs of different individuals. Zaydan, however, did not duplicate any of Keane's pictures, but instead included photographs to which his readers could relate. First, a picture of Yusuf Bey Karam, the notorious Syrian-Maronite from Mount Lebanon known for leading a

revolt against the Ottomans in the mid-nineteenth century, who Zaydan knew appealed to Christian-Syrians. He also included a portrait of Mustafa Kamil, the Egyptian nationalist who led an independence movement against the British, which appealed to many Egyptians, and lastly, a picture of two boys from Yemen, used for its allure to his readers from the Arabian Peninsula.

By piecing together theories from Western anthropological sources, interspersing them with his own commentary, and providing examples that were familiar to Arabic-speaking peoples, Zaydan catered his text to the tastes of his readers while promoting his agenda. He successfully fostered the common racial unity of the Arab-speaking peoples in tandem with transmitting Western knowledge to the Middle East and supporting the Syrian citizenship campaign in the United States. Zaydan passed away two years after the publication of *Tabaqat al-Umam*. Had he lived longer, there is no doubt he would have been glad to hear of Syrians in the United States being officially included as part of the Caucasian race, although he would have been concerned with the attitudes the Syrian-American community embraced toward their Muslim and fellow Arab brethren.

#### The Aftermath of the Citizenship Campaign

According to the United States census, by 1930, approximately fifty percent of Syrian immigrants had naturalized as American citizens.<sup>194</sup> In New York State alone, the percentage of naturalized Syrian men rose from 27.2 to

---

<sup>194</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2009), 80.

58.2 between 1920 and 1930.<sup>195</sup> The 1924 Johnson-Reed Act restricted immigration from Syria and the Lebanese mandate to 123 individuals annually, while limiting the remainder of the Arab world to 100 persons.<sup>196</sup> While it is unknown how strict immigration officials were regarding this quota, it is known that by 1924, Syrians had become classified as part of the Caucasian race.

Acceptance into the Caucasian race in the United States has historically meant the exclusion of other races and hostility towards those deemed racially unfit by American law. As shown by the Syrian campaign for citizenship, claiming Caucasian racial status meant denying any association with “colored” groups, primarily the “Mongolian” race. Even though Syrian immigrants distanced themselves from the Ottoman government during the citizenship battle, it was not until after the end of World War I and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire that their attitudes toward Turks and non-Europeans became increasingly hostile. No longer was the Syrian-American community concerned with proving their Semitic ancestry, but rather with promoting their Phoenician history. Prior to World War I, claiming kinship with the ancient Phoenicians did not necessarily work to the advantage of Syrians petitioning for citizenship, so why did Syrians in the United States adhere to Phoenicianism more vehemently after they were legally granted the right to naturalize? With the demise of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Greater Syria was divided and administered by European powers. Advocates of Phoenicianism in the Middle East and supporters of an independent Lebanon welcomed the French Mandate in Lebanon. Embracing

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> The law did not go into effect until July 1, 1929.

Phoenicianism in the United States allowed those in favor of the French Mandate to legitimize their support of it, while denouncing King Faisal's Arab government in Syria and later Iraq.<sup>197</sup> If Syrians claimed ties to the ancient Phoenicians, whom most held were part of the Indo-European race, then who better to control their land than their racial kin, the French?

It is unclear what percentage of early Muslim-Syrian immigrants renounced their Islamic heritage. Scholars have suggested that due to the lack of Muslim female immigrants, many male Muslim immigrants married outside of their faith, which resulted in the loss of their religious identity. With the American government's negative attitude towards the Ottoman regime during World War I, it is also believable that many denied their Muslim roots or practiced their faith in hiding. What is known is that Syrians in the United States became increasingly antagonistic toward Islam during the interwar period and associated themselves even more closely with the ancient Phoenicians. Of course, not all Syrian Americans denied any association with the Arab world. The Syrian-American literary figure, Amin al-Rihani, a Maronite Christian, known as a committed Arab secularist who fought for Arab culture and Arab political unity, attests to that. Al-Rihani is quoted as stating:

I am a born Lebanese, my language and nationality are Arab, and in my veins flow Phoenician, Canaanite, Aramaic and Chaldean blood. My heart is in Lebanon but my soul is in every Arab country. Even if I were a Christian Maronite, I would still be part of the rest of the sects and

---

<sup>197</sup> King Faisal was proclaimed King of Syria in 1920. His reign ended the same year when the French expelled him from Syria. In 1921 he became King of Iraq until 1933.



religions, which dissect this [Arab] nation. I believe there is no life for the Lebanese without the proximity of the Arabs.<sup>198</sup>

### Phoenicianism During the Interwar Period

Philip Hitti's *The Syrians in America* was a prominent text among Syrian Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. Although Kalil Bishara's book addressed similar topics, the two texts differed in their message. Unlike Bishara, Hitti in the first pages of his text, denied Syrians' association with the Arabs or the Ottomans. He stated: "The Syrians are not Turks. The Syrians are neither Turks, as the United States census would make them, nor Arabs..." He also claimed that the appellation *awlad al'Arab* (The Children of Arabs), was a misnomer because it had "linguistic rather than ethnic connotation."<sup>199</sup>

*The Syrian World*, played a prominent role in propagating the Phoenician myth in the United States. In almost every publication, Salloum Mokarzel, the founder of the newspaper, dedicated a section to the history of the ancient Phoenicians. Indeed, an article titled "The Phoenicians: Ancestors of the Syrians" appeared in the newspaper's first issue. The article stated: "Ancient Phoenicia is practically what is known today as the Republic of Lebanon, one of the political divisions of Syria under the French mandate. It is the birth-place of the Alphabet and of the art of deep-sea navigation." The remainder reprinted an excerpt from "A History of the Art of Writing" written by William A. Masson, which detailed the

---

<sup>198</sup> Amin al-Rihani, as quoted in *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2004), 214.

<sup>199</sup> Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924), 19.

positive contributions of the ancient Phoenicians to society.<sup>200</sup> Another paean to the ancient Phoenicians was a story titled “A Phoenician Queen of Beauty.” The story described a carnival in which the first prize for the best float “went to a Syrian girl,” who was represented as “a Phoenician Queen.”<sup>201</sup> There are countless other articles and stories that glorified the Phoenician ancestors of the modern Syro-Lebanese in *The Syrian World*, many more than before the interwar period.

Another theme that emerged in Syrian-American newspapers was negativity toward Islam. *Meerat ul-Gharb* (The Mirror of the West), a Syrian-American paper, launched in 1899 by Najib Diab, a Syrian-Orthodox, openly praised the French Mandate in Syria as a means of avoiding the nation’s “domination by Muslims.”<sup>202</sup> Aside from expressing political distrust, some Syrian Americans showed disdain for Islamic practices, as shown in an article in *The Syrian World* in 1926 titled “Her First Meeting with The Match-Maker,” which attacked the *hijab* (the veil worn by Muslim women) and the role of women in Islam. The article purported to narrate “the feelings” of a young Turkish-Muslim woman “of the old [Ottoman] regime,” who was visited by a professional matchmaker. The editor, Salloum Mokarzel, stated: “The conditions described [in this story] still exist in many Moslem countries and in some parts of Syria, where many of the Moslem women are still held prisoners behind their veils.”<sup>203</sup> The narration of the Turkish girl’s encounter is far from positive; it portrayed the young

---

<sup>200</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, “The Phoenicians: Ancestors of the Syrians,” *The Syrian World*, July 1926, 10.

<sup>201</sup> *The Syrian World*, July 1926, 62.

<sup>202</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 102.

<sup>203</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, *The Syrian World*, September 1926, 27.

woman as feeling degraded for having to show herself to a match-maker in pursuit of a “bridegroom,” who was “totally unknown” to her.<sup>204</sup>

With the citizenship campaign behind them, the Syrian-American community encountered new problems with the division of Greater Syria under the Mandate powers. With their acceptance in the United States as part of the Caucasian race, the community during the interwar period had to align itself culturally with the ancient Phoenicians and distinguish itself from “the others”—Muslims, Turks, and anyone the American government deemed as foreign. Due to the large Christian percentage of the early immigrants, they viewed associating themselves with Europeans as a means of diverting Muslim intervention in their homeland.

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

*By a decision handed down today by Federal Judge James H. Wilkinson, 51,900 Syrian residents of the United States and 36,600 Armenians obtain a chance to become citizens, a hope that was denied them in rulings made last month by Federal Judge George A. Carpenter.*

*The New York Times, June 28, 1924*

Approaching the racial struggle endured by the first Syrian Americans from a transnational perspective provides a richer understanding of their battle for inclusion in the United States. It also brings into context the rise of racial science in the Middle East and the role of Middle Eastern intellectuals in the dissemination of racial ideology throughout the Syrian diaspora. It is a daunting task to discern which elements the first Syrian American immigrants adopted from the plethora of nationalist ideologies circulating in the Middle East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, it appears that they did not embrace one single framework, but a medley of concepts that suited their needs. It was not until their success in attaining the right to naturalize and the end of World War I that they aligned themselves more closely with the Lebanese national movement. Most importantly, situating the early Syrian Americans in a global context dispels the belief that they relinquished their emotional, cultural, and political ties to their homeland when they settled in the United States.

The first task of this study was to position Syrian immigrants in the wider development of Phoenicianism and Arab nationalism in the Middle East. The

most significant sources used were the Syrian prerequisite cases, particularly the one involving George Dow. Kalil Bishara's text, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, was also a valuable resource. Both sources reflected different approaches to race because they represented different sectors of the early Syrian-American enclave. George Dow could have been typical of the average Syrian immigrant seeking racial acceptance. Unlike Dow, Bishara was a highly educated and arguably elite member of the first Syrian immigrant community who produced both English and Arabic editions of his book with an international audience in mind. Bishara's text was concrete evidence of the transnational flow of ideas between the United States and the Arab world. Na'um Mokarzel's funding and support of his work represented the interest in Syrian racial cases by politically active Syrians in the United States.

Another goal of this study was to introduce Jurji Zaydan as a driving force in the dissemination of scientific knowledge in communities in both the Middle East and the United States. Chapter 4 focused on the development of his racial ideology, which culminated in his trailblazing study, *Tabaqat al-Umam*, a text that introduced a racial paradigm based on hierarchies for all Arabic-speaking people. Most of Zaydan's conclusions were not original in an international context, and many of his theories were derived from other European sources. However, his ability to educate and inspire Arab-speaking people around the world was unique. Even more fascinating was Zaydan's interest in Western knowledge and his skill at appropriating American developments in racial thought. While Syrian Americans wrote to him for his expertise on history and science, Zaydan followed

their citizenship campaign and incorporated successful arguments from their naturalization cases into his racial theory.

After Zaydan's death and the racial "success" of the first Syrian Americans, the issue of race became secondary to new issues that developed in the United States and the Middle East. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the division of Greater Syria, race became a means by which many Syrians in the United States showed their support for Middle Eastern, though not so much for American, political causes. While Syrian Americans worked hard to preserve their Caucasian status, their attention was diverted during the interwar period to racially aligning themselves with Europeans, particularly the French, who desired political intervention in the Middle East. The interwar period saw a resurgence of Phoenicianism among Syrian Americans, but with the caveat that they denied association with Islam.

Even though Syrian Americans denied association with Islam during the interwar period, many Muslim emigrated from the Arab world inherited the legacy left by the first Syrians to settle in the United States in the years that followed. After the passing of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, which imposed an annual quota of around one hundred individuals from the Arab world to be admitted for emigration, the Syrian-American community did not receive many new immigrants to help reinforce and maintain its ties to the homeland.<sup>205</sup> It was not until the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which abolished the national quotas, that an unprecedented number of Syrians and other Arab and Middle Eastern groups

---

<sup>205</sup> Iraq, Palestine/Transjordan, Egypt, The Arabian Peninsula, Morocco (French and Spanish Zones including Tangier) were allotted 100 individuals annually while Syria and the Lebanese mandate were allotted 123 individuals.

emigrated to the United States. Even though the United States had officially renounced any racial requirement for naturalization in 1952, because of the precedent set by the Syrian prerequisite cases, immigration officials unequivocally labeled the large wave of Middle Eastern immigrants after 1965 as Caucasian.

### Qualms With Whiteness

It was approximately one hundred years ago that Costa George Najour petitioned for citizenship on the grounds that he was Caucasian. In the wake of the 2010 census, a group of Arab and Persian Americans launched “Check it Right,” a campaign designed to persuade Arab Americans to check the “Other” box and fill in their ethnic origin on the United States census. The campaign’s slogan, “Check it right; you ain’t white,” urged Americans of Arab and Persian heritage to reject their Caucasian status. Supporters of the campaign argued that by affirming their racial identity as Caucasian, Arab Americans downplay that they are discriminated against and not afforded the same privileges as “true whites.” Omar Masry, the co-chair of the Arab-American Complete Count Committee and leader of the “Check it Right” campaign, claimed that if Arabs are going to be treated differently, they should highlight their racial difference to get equal representation. He stated: “We are being profiled anyway, so why don’t we take pride in ourselves and take advantage of it?”<sup>206</sup> It is unclear what changes will occur in the “white” status of Arab Americans in the years to come. With the

---

<sup>206</sup> “Arab- and Persian-American campaign: ‘Check it right’ on census,” accessed May 10, 2012, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-01/us/census.check.it.right.campaign\\_1\\_arab-american-leaders-census-form-persian/2?s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-01/us/census.check.it.right.campaign_1_arab-american-leaders-census-form-persian/2?s=PM:US).

shift towards ethnic rather than racial identification, it appears that young Arab Americans are embracing their origins and identifying less with whiteness.



## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Antonius, George. *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement*. La Vergne, Tennessee: Simon Publications, 2001.

Bettany, George T. *The World's Inhabitants or Mankind, Animals, and Plants: Being a Popular Account of the Races and Nations of Mankind, Past and Present, and the Animals and Plants Inhabiting the Great Continents and Principal Islands*. London and New York: Ward Lock & Co., 1888.

Bishara, Kalil A. *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*. New York: Al-Hoda Publishing House, 1914.

Hitti, Philip. *The Syrians in America*. New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924.

Ibn Khaldun. *Muqqaddimah*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1958.

Ibn Qutayba. *al-Ma'arif*. Edited by Tharwat Ukasha. Cairo, Egypt: 1969.

Keane, Augustus H. *The World's Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1908.

Salem, Sema'an I., and Alok Kumar. *Science in the Medieval World: Book of the Categories of Nations by Sa'id al-Andalusi*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1991.

Zaydan, Jurji. *Tabaqat al-Umam aw al-sala'il al-bashariyya*. al-Flaja, Egypt: Matba'a al-Hilal, 1912.

### Electronic sources:

Blake, John. "Arab and Persian-American Campaign: 'Check it Right' on Census." Accessed July 10, 2012.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/04/01/census.check.it.right.campaign/index.html>.

Smith, Ellison D. "Shut The Door." *Congressional Record* 68 (April 9, 1924): E5961–5962. Accessed October 9, 2012.  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5080/>.

Newspapers, Journals, and Periodicals:

*Al-Hilal* (Cairo)  
*Al-Muqtataf* (Beirut, Cairo)  
*The Syrian World* (New York)

United States Court Cases:

Dow v. United States, 226 F. 145., (1915).  
Ex Parte Dow, 211 F. 486., E.D.S.C., (1914).  
Ex Parte Shahid, 205 F. 812., (1913).  
In Re Dow, 213 F. 355., ( 1914).  
In Re Ellis, 179 F. 1002., D. Or., (1910).  
In Re Najour, 174 F. 735., (1909).

Secondary Sources:

Farag, Nadia. "The Lewis Affair and Fortunes of al-Muqtataf." *Middle Eastern Studies* 8 (1972): 73-83.

Fortna, Benjamin. *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Period*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Fredrickson, George. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Glass, Dagmar. *Der Muqtataf und seine Öffentlichkeit: Aufklärung, Rasonnement und Meinungsstreit in der frü hen arabischen Zeitschriftenkommunikation*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2004.

Gualtieri, Sarah. *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*. Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2009.

Hurvitz, Nimrod. "Muhibb ad-Din al-Khatib's Semitic Wave Theory and Pan-Arabism." *Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1993): 118-134.

Jacobson, Matthew F. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Karpat, Kemal H. "The Ottoman Emigration to America." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (1985): 175-209.

- Kaufman, Asher. *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2004.
- Keddie, Nikki. *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Keddie, Nikki. *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.
- Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Lopez, Haney. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Naff, Alixa. *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigration Experience*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1985.
- Ngai, Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Philipp, Thomas. "Jurji Zaydan's role in the Syro-Arab Nahda." In *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers, and Identity*, edited by Adel Beshara, 79-89. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Pratt, Marie L. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Serageldin, Ismail. "Jurji Zaidan: His Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature." On the occasion of the conference held at The Library of Congress on Jurji Zaidan's Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature, Washington DC, June 5, 2012.
- Trout-Powell, Eve. *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of Sudan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003.

Oral Interview:

Barbara Bonahoom-Davenport, conducted April 24, 2013. Barbara was 85 at the time the interview took place.