

Interview 33

This interview was conducted by The Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC) of The Graduate Center, City University of New York (June 2002 – June 2003)

Gender of respondent: Female

Age: 25

Q. First I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born?

A. New York.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. I grew up actually between New York and England.

Q. How old were you when you started living in the United States?

A. Well, I was born here in New York and I lived in New York until I was eight years old and then we ... at that time we moved to England. And I came back to the United States for college and I only moved back to New York in December.

Q. Oh really? December two thousand and...

A. December 2001, yes.

Q. What do you consider to be your ethnic background?

A. I am mixed: half Palestinian, half English, so I guess ethnically that would make me what, half English half European? I don't know.

Q. Okay. Where was your father born?

A. Palestine.

Q. And your mother?

A. [Name], to the north of England.

Q. What is your religious affiliation?

A. I was baptized into the Christian [church] but haven't practiced religion since that point so my heritage is Christian, but I'm not religious.

Q. And what about your parents?

A. They're the same, Christian heritage, but

Q. And how old are you now?

A. Twenty-five.

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. I have a Master's degree.

Q. In what?

A. Arab Studies.

Q. And where did you get your degree?

A. Georgetown.

Q. In what year?

A. I did a joint BA/MA. I finished in 2000.

Q. In what country did you obtain your education?

A. Here in the U.S. Oh, college in the U.S., but I completed English schooling. I have A levels. Did ... A levels in England and then I came to the United States for college.

Q. Okay. And what is your main occupation?

A. I work for the [name of organization].

Q. What is it that you exactly do?

A. I work in the New York office, so doing membership relations, outreach, responding to complaints, legal referrals, at least as much as I can, not being a lawyer, advocacy for civil rights issues Palestine issues...

Q. What is your job title?

A. [Removed].

Q. What is your marital status?

A. I'm single

Q. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th. Where were you on that day around 9 a.m.?

A. I was in Haifa, actually. I was living in Palestine.

Q. And how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I was in a coffee shop owned by a friend of mine. I had just gotten back from South Africa --I was in the World Conference Against Racism the day before --and I met up with a friend and we went to another friend of ours' coffee shop. And we got there and he said, "Did you hear about the planes hitting the towers?" This was when only the first plane had hit at this point. And I thought he was kidding and I said, "Stop teasing. You know ... my family's from New York." And he said, "I'm not kidding." His brother was visiting. He said, "[Name] just called and he said that we're ... that the planes hit the tower." and ... I thought he was kidding until I pulled out my cell phone and started dialing the United States to try to--you know--call his bluff, thinking he's, like, "No, no, no. Don't. I'm only kidding. And when he let me dial the whole number and it started ringing, that's when I got ... oh, it didn't start ringing actually. None of the calls went through for hours. The phone lines were completely blocked. The international lines were completely blocked. So that's how I found out. So then I went out, and in the mall they had these huge screens showing in the mall. So then I jumped in a cab and went home and turned on the TV and didn't leave the living room for ... three days.

Q. What was your first reaction other than...

A. Well, when I realized it was true ... at first I laughed 'cause I thought it was a joke and I thought ... Well, I didn't laugh actually. I thought it was a sick joke and I said cut it out. And then, I mean, I was horrified. What can you ... I couldn't believe it. I was absolutely shocked. And I think ... I thought at first, "Oh my God," it was an accident. What a horrible accident. And then when the second plane hit I realized it wasn't an accident, and then my first thought was "Oh God, don't make it be Arabs." That was my first ... my second thought maybe. My first was horror and my second was: "Oh my God, don't make that be Arabs."

Q. How was your reaction to the possibility that the terrorists could be them?

A. I mean, it was a double wammy, I think, for everyone in the community, just to be so shocked and horrified by it and then have, at the same time, that fear that it was someone from your own community, even though you, of course, don't associate with them at all. but just ... It was horrible. And then, of course, my first thought was immediately: Oh my God, what's this going to mean for Arabs in the United States?

Q. What were your feelings about what happened immediately afterwards?

A. Well, my first thought was fear for people here in New York. I mean, that was my first instinct. I mean, like, I have ... my family's here and my cousins are here and their children and so my first fear ... And my parents were here at the time and my sister. And I knew that my sister and her boyfriend were visiting from England and they were planning to sight see for the next couple of days so I thought, God, heaven forbid that they were sight seeing down there. And that was my first fear. And I couldn't call. I couldn't ... I tried for five hours and couldn't get through to New York. And I had my finger on the

redial, redialing and redialing and redialing, tried while watching the TV and just ... watching the Towers fall and could--I couldn't get through on the phone. All the lines were jammed. And ultimately I found out that my family was okay via an aunt in [name] who was in touch with someone in England who had been in touch with someone in Connecticut. Yeah. It was a really long, tortured route. But so that was my first feeling I guess.

Q. Did you feel anger?

A. Not at the beginning. I was too shocked at the beginning. I mean...

Q. You had mentioned that--not that you were nervous but that you were hoping that it wasn't Arabs. Was guilt involved because Arabs or Muslims were involved in the attack?

A. No. It wasn't a guilt. It wasn't a feeling of guilt that ... 'cause I had nothing to do with it. And, I mean, I mean, I knew also that ... that I don't think it's an indictment of our culture or ... I'm not Muslim but I don't think it's an indictment of Islam. It was more a fear of they already think we're terrorists. They already think we're violent. They already have the worst possible opinion of us. And how much worse it is going to get after this?

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events, this feeling of people looking at Arabs and Muslims differently?

A. No. I ... my ... changed in that respect, no.

Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th?

A. I think when the towers actually fell. I was on the phone trying to get news of my family and I was on the balcony in my apartment. And my friend who I had been having

lunch with came back home with me, screamed to me to come here. And I ran in. And just as I ran in the Towers were beginning to collapse. And that's my most vivid memory.

Q. When Americans asked you about your ethnic background or origin before September 11th what did you tell them?

A. Half Palestinian, half English.

Q. And what about immediately after 9-11?

A. Yeah, the same. I mean, I was in Palestine so I didn't ... it wasn't an issue. I mean, I would have said the same thing either way but I didn't have to deal with that as an issue after 9-11.

Q. So you say this now as well?

A. Oh yeah, Absolutely. I have nothing to be ashamed of. We ... None of us have anything to be ashamed of.

Q. Have your feelings toward the U.S. change since 9-11?

A. No.

Q. What about politically? Has your level of political awareness changed?

A. No. I mean, I've always been deeply critical of American foreign policy so nothing has changed in that respect.

Q. What about foreign policy are you critical of?

A. It would be much quicker to say what I like about foreign policy. I mean, I think that ... I think America acts like a big bully in the world ... in the world playground. I've always thought that and I still think that. Obviously specifically the situation in Palestine, America's support for Israel is inexcusable. But generally the way America marches it's two left feet around the world as if it's its own back yard is disgusting.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States?

A. Yeah. I grew up here, well, between here and England. Yeah, absolutely.

Q. Have you always felt like this?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East have been treated in the U.S. since 9-11?

A. Has there been a change in the way Yeah, absolutely.

Q. How so?

A. Well, I think that ... I mean, I don't think it's fundamentally changed. I think that problems that we faced pre-9-11 have been exacerbated drastically by 9-11. But there's still a lot of discrimination and racism and a lack of understanding--a lack of a desire to understand who Arabs are, what their culture is, what their legitimate grievances are. I mean ... I mean, I think that those have always been issues but there are much, much worse issues now. We see all types of discrimination, work place discrimination, harassment, hate crimes, problems with the police.

Q. This is more since 9-11 or you think it's just been more visible?

A. More since 9-11. I think it's been much more visible. But I think there's always been an enormous degree of racism. I mean, there's always been towards all the new immigrant groups a tremendous amount of racism in this country and we're not the first community to suffer from this type of thing. The Irish complained about the same things. The Italians complained about the same things. But it's gotten a lot worse, I think, since September 11th, just in the sheer volume and in the fact that now, I think people are much less open to hearing criticism of the United States--much less open to listening to the legitimate

grievances that you have--that we have. So ... that has ... that has changed. And also there's never been this much legislation threatening our civil liberties as immigrants and as Ar-- ... I mean, it's all immigrants but obviously Arabs are particularly being targeted. And that is unprecedented except, of course, with the glaring exception of the Japanese during World War II with the internment. But other than that, I mean, this is one of the most terrifying times in history in terms of our civil liberties and the way that our civil liberties are being threatened as all Americans, but particularly as Arab-Americans obviously with ... excepting the internment.

Q. Do you know of examples of the way people have been treated differently?

A. Yeah.

Q. Examples of harassment?

A. Well, I get them through work, obviously, many cases of discrimination --work place discrimination or problems with the police or problems ... just general problems with neighbors--you know?--someone leaving a...

Q. So it's at a local level and at a governmental level as well?

A. Yeah. Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, and the two feed off each other. I mean, there might have been pronouncements from everyone from the President down that Arabs are our friends and Muslims are not our enemy, but in practice the government has engaged in ethnic and racial profiling, and the government right from the top, of the Executive to the policeman on the street has engaged in ethnic profiling as a matter of policy. And the INS has a specific policy to ethnically profile, The FBI has a specific policy to ethnically profile Arabs. So, I mean, that's def--you definitely get it from the government. And people ... and the public feeds off that, and the media, of course, has been extremely

irresponsible. So, yeah. I see it as coming from three levels, government, private individuals and media.

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash after 9-11?

A. No.

Q. Has any member of your family?

A. No. But we're lucky 'cause we're--you know—"lucky," 'cause we all look ... we all have fairly light skin, we speak without accents, we sort of fit in. We ... I mean, I'm first generation [sic] but I ... we all of my relatives speak without an accent and we don't look obviously Arab. And I think if there's any ... ever been any indication of what ... of the fact that this type of anti-Arab sentiment is racism it's just that. I mean, you don't get problems unless you have dark skin or you speak with an accent. And if that's not racist, what is?

Q. Do you think Middle Eastern organizations have been effective in handling the backlash against Arabs after 9-11?

A. I think some of them have. Some of them have worked really hard. I mean, I work for one so it's ... I'm not the most objective source. But I didn't start working for the organization I work for until December so I wasn't here for that period immediately after. What I've heard about the work that they did is that they were working around the clock on behalf of the community. The trouble is the resources that we have are extremely limited as Arab organizations in the United States. And I work for the largest national organization and, I mean, we're ... I won't say drastically under funded because we still do have very good and important programs, but unfortunately we don't have the ... the resources to provide every necessary service. I mean, it would be terrific if we had the

resources, for example, to have staff attorneys in every city as a community, Arab language staff attorneys in every city. We don't have the resources to do that. We don't have the resources to take on our own cases, and I'm referring specifically to the [name removed], but I think this is a problem ... there isn't an organization ... we don't have an Arab-American Legal Defense Fund. They have an Asian-American Legal Defense Fund, an African-American Legal Defense Fund ... we don't have anything like that so we have to rely on people to do pro bono work or other organizations who can provide support to our community. I think ... well, I'm not ... that's another issue, but it's been difficult. But, I mean, we've been working tremendously hard so ... I mean, I'm sure that there has been criticism but ... but the organizations involved have been working tremendously hard and I think they're doing a terrific job. And I mean, I started working with [name removed] partly because I think the work that they're doing is so important. And I think ... I'm sure there might have been gaps and people might have disagreed with certain policy decisions or ... situation had there not been Arab-American organizations doing some of this work would have ... would be even more drastic.

Q. You think they've been working hard in response since 9-11?

A. Oh yeah. I know they've been working hard. [Removed]. I know how hard we've been working. Not just me, but I know that in our national office the type of hours that they've been ... that they were keeping, particular around the time of 9-11. There's no question about how hard they have ... they have been working. How effective have they ... have they been is a different question, but how hard have they been working, they've been diffi-- terribly diffi--terribly hard with very limited resources.

Q. Do you think that they've managed to organize or mobilize the community politically?

A. That's a good question. No.

Q. Why?

A. I don't think we have organized as a community well enough yet. I think part of that is not so much to do with... part of that is definitely to do with the organizations. We have not had the resources to go in and do the grassroots organizing that we could be doing. Part of it is the community has not been willing to be mobilized. I know that here in New York we've tried to plan things. When we tried to plan things as simple as a "Know Your Rights" training the turn out is pathetic. People don't want to come. They're not interested. They want to keep their heads down, do not want to ... I mean, we had a town hall meeting down in Bay Ridge Brooklyn where we invited various different government agencies and non-governmental organizations. When I say governmental agencies, we had the Equal Employment Opportunities commission, we had the Hate Crimes Task Force, we had the Human Rights Division of ... Human Rights Commission, part of the New York City government, we had the Justice Department's Human ... Civil Rights Division, and so we had all of the governmental agencies that are on our sides, all the ones doing the human rights work or the civil rights work, all the ones doing work really for us, and I literally had people saying: what is they're taking pictures at the door when ... when we asked them to come, people to come and participate and to hear about what their rights are. So, I mean, that's been ... that's been very hard. I mean, there have been forums that have been very successful. I don't want to make it sound like that we haven't been able to ... I mean, I know that there was a forum organized by a Yemini

association which was very well attended--it was all in Arabic--and I know that that was very well attended, but it has been difficult for community organizations to organize. People aren't so excited about ... about the ... people aren't willing to organize and advocate for their own interests. People are scared for a lot ... I mean, a lot of people are scared. A lot of people are nervous. A lot of people don't want to identify any more that is necessary as Arab for fear of drawing attention to themselves and suffering from worse harassment, maybe ... or maybe have a relative who's an illegal immigrant, for example and we just haven't ... I don't think as a community we reached that point of political maturing where we recognize the only way to be heard is to scream loudly and to be organized. That's how American democracy works and we haven't, I don't think, reached that stage as a community yet.

Q. What do you think organizations or we as a community can do to become more politically aware or become involved in the community?

A. I mean, there are a lot of different ways that people can become active in the community. I mean, the things like protesting, I mean, on a very local level INS and NYPD cooperation, for example. I mean, that's something that we all have an interest in and we have to voice our displeasure. We have to write to our representatives. I mean, there are people who are scared to get involved politically because of their immigration status. But there are many others who are citizens who are not advocating for their own interests. I mean, there's no reason why we can't all be meeting with our City counselors and telling them pass legislation banning ... That's one of the projects that we're working on, trying to work with other immigrant rights groups to create legislation that would be passed by the City Council which would prohibit NYPD and INS cooperation. This is

something that has implications for every immigrant groups. But right now we're the target immigrant group. And there's no reason why every Arab-American--every Arab with American citizenship or every Arab who's a legal immigrant here, could not be calling their City Counselor and advocating for their interest and saying we ... we as a community are ... are united on this. I mean, I wish that when we had actions we could count on there being ten thousand people there, but we just can't. And part of that's our fault. We haven't made enough of an effort to get into the community to speak .. to try to organize. I mean, I'm not absolving the organizations, necessarily, of all responsibility in this. I'm certainly not trying to put the blame entirely on...

Q. On the community.

A. You know--some--you know--what ... who is the community anyway? But I mean, we just haven't ... I don't think... . It's a process that we have to go through together, the organizations and community leaders and the community but we're not quite there yet. And here are a lot of ... of issues that people can rally around. There have been weekly demonstrations outside the Metropolitan Detention Center against the detention of immigrants in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and we as Arab-Americans have been outnumbered, probably three to one, at ... on a good day by other ... other immigrant communities or by--you know--concerned non-Arab, non-immigrant, non-minority groups. And there's a certain among ... to a certain extent that is understandable, I mean, is understandable that a white Christian from Park Slope is going to be considerably less concerned about going to a demonstration than a Yemeni Green Card holder who lives in Bay Ridge. There's no question about that. But there are plenty of Arabs who are American citizens who were not at those demonstrations. I mean, I could count on one

hand the number of Arab-Americans that came from Manhattan to attend those ... those weekly demonstrations. I can count on one hand.

Q. Do you think it's because they're not aware or just a general sense of apathy?

A. I think a general sense of apathy, a sense of what's the point, why bother? The odds are so stacked against us. But that's so disempowering and a self-defeating prophecy--I mean, a self-fulfilling prophecy. There's no point in doing anything so we won't do anything so we never get anything done, so there's ... so we ... so there's no point in doing anything so we never get anything done ... I don't know. That's a tough one. It's a tou-- ... I mean, partly, the Manhattan community wasn't really affected by the INS round ups either so there isn't that sense of ... maybe there isn't that sense of community solidarity. I don't know. I don't have all the answers.

Q. No. But as part of an organization, the [name removed], what do you think ... Forget other organizations. What do you think the [name removed] can do more to politically motivate or to organize the community, to make them more politically aware or...

A. That's a good question. I think we have to ... among the things that we're looking at doing--and this office has only been open since December so...

Q. The one in New York?

A. Um-hum, so we've only been around for about eight months now so it's a learning curve. But I think one thing that we're ... that I'm realizing and that we're working on is the fact that we do have to make a greater effort to create those linkages between ... or to raise awareness within the Manhattan community about--or not the Manhattan community; that's not a good way of putting it--to raise awareness within the established

older communities about the need to advocate on this issue and just... . You know, I don't know. It's a good question because part of the trouble isn't lack of awareness. I mean, a lot of people know what's happening and they're still not particularly involved. So I really don't know. I mean, we're working on trying to get the community where we already had a presence, which is much more in Manhattan than Brooklyn, trying to get that ... this group more organized, trying to work on several different fronts. And we have various committees working on different issues. But I think we need to get into the community in Brooklyn more. I think we don't ... we don't have enough ties there yet. We need to organize where possible in ... within the more established Arab-American community in Brooklyn. That's the oldest ... one of the oldest Arab-American communities in the country.

A. In the city? Really!

A. Oh yeah. The Arab-American community in Brooklyn has been here since the 18--I mean, the 1870s. The first Arab immigrants that came to New York settled up in Manhattan and then ultimately went down into Brooklyn. And so you have people who are there who are third, fourth, fifth--I guess--I don't know--at least fourth generation, I would imagine, and I think we need to do more there. We need to learn from other immigrant community groups. One of the organizations that we've been working with recently is AALDEF, which is Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, because they do a lot of outreach work and they have a lot of experience organizing their community. And I think we have to try to learn from them. And that's a good question. I don't know. If you have any ideas, let me know.

Q. I will definitely recognize it. Other than [name removed], have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations since 9-11?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic groups and others in the United States at this time?

A. You mean between Arab-Americans and others 'cause the English part of me has no problems. Everyone loves English. I mean, there are so many issues I wouldn't know where to start.

Q. Do you think that relations are more tolerant or harmonious or more strained and somewhat oppositional?

A. I think ... I mean, my perception is that they're more strained. But that's not true across the board and we have had tremendous solidarity from other ... from other communities like the Southeast Asian community, the Japanese-American community we've had a lot of support from, and also because we aren't the only ones going through this. Southeast Asians and other Muslims are facing very, very similar issues so, I mean, we've had a lot of ... we've ... relationships with those groups are now better than they ever were and that's very important. Between Arab-Americans and white Americans, if you want to use those terms, I think they're probably more strained and I think there's a ... there's a tremendous amount of ignorance about Arab-Americans in mainstream American culture and that's been true for years and I think now more ... that's the case more than ever. I mean, I known from personal experience. I haven't had ... I was just actually discussing on the way over here a case of a friend--a family friend--who had from one of his oldest friends post-9-11 saying: You know, we've known each other for

twenty-five years. How are we going to get through this? We shared an office even and now I don't know what to do. I don't know how to look at you and I don't know what ... and this ... absolutely obscene and ludicrous, a very emotional response from this ... this friend of our family friend ... which is incredible--which was incredible. I mean, even people who think that ... consider themselves liberal have, I think, some ... I mean, I don't want to make broad generalizations or I'm not better than they are, but, I mean, there have, I think, been people who've been quite surprised by their knee jerk racism. I've heard several stories ... I mean, this ... I've read the email that you're ... that your referring to and it's just racist. I'm sorry. It's just racist. I mean, to make generalizations about community is racist. I don't ... I don't care if a couple of Arabs have committed a crime, that doesn't make it acceptable to judge all Arabs, just like a couple of African-Americans committing a crime doesn't make it acceptable to be racist or a couple of Jews committing a crime doesn't give you the right to be anti-Semitic. I mean, there's ... there's no ... there are no excuses. I'm sorry. So, yeah. We definitely face that. But I mean, but I don't want to exaggerate that because we have also faced a lot ... or had a lot of support from different communities and also--you know--from peace groups here and others. So, I mean, I don't want to overstate that. I mean, I don't think we're at the point of massive communal tension à la Lebanon. I mean, we're not at that point. I think we're ... But there has been ... I think the relationship has been strained certainly. There's no question about that.

Q. What do you think members of the Arab-American community can do to improve relations between the ethnic or religious groups?

A. That's a good question. Presume meeting between the groups with whom our relationships have become strained.

Q. Yes.

A. I mean, dialogue is always important where possible. We do need to engage in dialogue with groups who are open and receptive to hearing about ... about us. But I think that the trouble with that is that we tend to get defensive and I don't think we have to be defensive I think we can be proud of our culture and our heritage. And I don't have any apologies. We don't need to apologize for who we are and I've seen quite a bit of that in general in the ... in the media and in sort of some of the encounters that I've seen. I think we ... and work hard to educate ... educate other communities about who Arab Americans are, about what our history is, about what our legitimate grievances are ... I think those things do need to be understood. I think America as a nation has missed out on a tremendous opportunity to understand more about itself in the last nine months. I think as horrific and appalling and excusable and unjustified as it was, 9-11 did give us an opportunity to invest--to ask questions as Americans and I don't think we've taken that opportunity, which is a great shame. But it doesn't mean that we can't criticize and be ... and be critical. And I think that's our responsibility as citizens, to be critical and to ask questions and to be critical and to defend ourselves and to stand up for ourselves. And to not do that is ... to silence ourselves and to become more introverted, which I think we have done to a certain extent, is not, in my opinion personally, I think going to ... as a community. I mean, I'm not blaming individuals 'cause I know people have been scared. But to do so as a community I think is concerning--is worry because when we close the channels of communication we're left with nothing.

Q. What do you think Middle Eastern or South Asian-American organizations can do to improve the relations? I mean, we were talking about the community... .

A. Yeah. I mean, I think we can ... we can do the types of things that we have been doing, which is making ... doing outreach to these other groups, working together on projects, finding issues of common ground or finding areas of common ground or issues of joint—of mutual concern and working together on them. Like, just for example, on this INS/NYPD cooperation thing we've been trying to do outreach to various groups from various different communities, some of whom we might have had strained relationships about some issues, some of whom we have not had strained relationships, to try to show or to try to work together on issues ... on this issue of mutual concern. So I think we can do that. I think we can generally raise awareness about who we are as organizations and representatives of our community and do our best to put ... where a positive face on ... or a positive and recognizable face on the community. And as organizations I think we have to be organized to the point where we can do ... go out into schools and do presentations in schools and presentations at universities and at community forums. And that's something that we are doing and ... and should be doing more of.

Q. So you are doing that, reaching out to the...?

A. Yeah, we are ... we are doing a bit. I mean, we haven't done as much outreach. It's more been ... with regard to schools, it's more been, at least from my experience, responding to requests to have speakers going to schools. I think we could be doing a lot more outreach to schools to offer to come in and do presentations on the Arab world ... and as parents we can also take an active role in watching over what our students or our

children are learning making sure that there aren't negative representations of Arab-Americans in school books or Arabs in school books, and where there are, either contacting organizations who are empowered to a certain extent to deal with this kind of thing, like [name removed], or in taking the school book in to your kids' teacher and saying: Look. this is not acceptable. You know? Why don't you, instead of providing ... having this book, why don't you have them read this book, or why don't you not use this particular textbook to study the history of the Arab world, type of thing. And I think we can be vigilant as individuals and as organizations to areas where Arabs are being stereotyped or profiled or ... and so on. That's a long, rambling answer to that but that ... does that address the question you asked?

Q. Given your understanding of the status of Middle Eastern and South Asian groups in the United States after 9-11, would you encourage people from these countries to emigrate to the U.S.?

A. Yes, but do so legally I think would be the advice I would give. Yeah. Why not? I mean, this country's always thrived on and needed immigrants and I don't think ... I don't think the situation is so bad that I would say no, don't come. But I'd definitely say don't come unless you're documented because now is not the time to be without status in the United States. There's no question about it. I hate this term illegal immigrant but ... I think it's appalling to criminalize immigration, but to be out of status in the United States now is very, very dangerous--very dangerous. There's no question about it, especially if you're Arab or Muslim, because the chances of you getting deported immediately are very slim. You'll most likely be imprisoned for several months and then, if you're lucky, deported. So I would say definitely be careful. But don't not come at all.

Q. What is it about the United States that you would encourage people to come for?

A. Oh, I don't think I would actively encourage them. I just ... I really wouldn't discourage them. I mean, I don't think that it's a particularly better place than anywhere else in the world. But, I mean, for people who are planning on coming anyway, I wouldn't say don't come. I mean, this is a great country. I mean, I can't complain. It's been good to me and good to my family. I'm not ... there is a lot of opportunity here--there's no question about it, for people who are resourceful and smart and willing to play the game. But I wouldn't ... I'm certainly not going to go... .

Q. But you wouldn't actively discourage them?

A. I wouldn't actively discourage them, but I wouldn't be-- what's it called? --a missionary either.

Q. We've talked about some negative consequences of 9-11. Do you think that there were or are any positive consequences?

A. Yeah. I think that there has been an unprecedented amount of interest in who this community is and in Islam. Some of that has been ... has worked against us when people have turned to the wrong sources. But that's a good ... that's a good thing. I think it's a good thing for the wrong reason, though. I mean, I don't think that understanding Islam is how ... why ... I mean, I don't think understanding Islam as a religion will help you understand 9-11. I think if you want to understand 9-11 you've got to look at American foreign policy in addition to understand--an understanding of the intri--of the situation ... or how this particular bran of radicalism developed so I think that that's a little bit misguided. But ... but I think ... but it is a positive ... a positive thing. And I think it also has given us an opportunity to form relationships with communities that we historically

maybe didn't have as good a relationship with or--not that we had bad relationships with, but we ... that we maybe didn't have relationships with--full stop, and that is definitely ... something positive. It's terrible to think of positive things coming out of such a tragedy, though.

Q. Do you think that there's been a more visibility or improved understanding of Middle Easterners or Muslims in the U.S.? I mean, you mentioned that there was a more interest in our community and Islam. Do you think that there's been an improved understanding?

A. Yes and no. To a ... I mean, yes, there has been up and to a point. Unfortunately, oftentimes people go straight to the wrong sources, I think, and the media's particular guilty of this. I mean, if I have to see [name removed]--if I hear him again speaking about Islam I'm going to scream. The fact that someone like him gets air-time is unbelievable and I think that's very, very problematic. There's a very ... tendency to turn to Americans and white people to discuss the rest of the world and ... and other world religions and I think that is disgusting. It's extremely racist. I mean, I remember there was an exchange--this incredible exchange--between [names removed] who's, like, Communications [Director] for the [name removed], talking about the word jihad and [name removed] was saying, "But jihad means holy war," and [name removed] saying, "No. It means ... " and at one point [name removed] pulled out Webster's dictionary and says, but here in Webster's it's defined ... and I was, like, I mean, since when did you look at Webster's to understand an Arab word? I mean, with all due respect to the writers of Webster's dictionary, my understanding is that they are not Arab linguists. They're Amer-- ... they're English linguists. I mean, this is unbelievable arrogance. And, I mean, that's just one

example but I always ... it always comes to mind. It's just the most glaring example of looking to the wrong source, to look at Webster's and you have an Arab standing there telling you what the word means in Arabic, the Arabic that I grew up with—oh, he's unbelievable. So I think that's problematic but you know...

Q. This is the media.

A. Yeah. That's the media. And unfortunately that's what you've come to expect from the media here, unfortunately. But anyway...

Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened?

A. That's a good question. I don't know. Unfortunately, the nineteen people who committed the crime are dead so we can't ask them. Oh, I don't know. I mean, I think that someone somewhere was trying to teach the United States a lesson, I guess, someone somewhere that America had trained and funded. But we won't go into that. I don't think there's a good reason why it happened. I mean, there's no ... I don't know why it happened. I don't think there's a ... I mean...

Q. Do you think Arabs or Muslims in the Middle East hate America?

A. No. I think, from my experience, there are those Arabs and Muslims who express dissatisfaction with this country are ... direct, for the most part, their criticism at the American government. And I think there's certainly very legitimate anger at American ... the American government and its policies. But I don't know that ... I don't think that people throughout the Arab world hate America and ...

Q. 'Cause you hear it in the media all the time that the Arabs hate America; that people in the Middle East hate America.

A. Yeah. Yeah, I know, people like [Thomas] Friedman who are psychic. Right?--and therefore can read the mind of how many million?--two hundred and fifty million Arabs? Yeah, I know. I know. You hear that a lot, mostly from non-Arabs. Yeah. But I don't ... I mean, I don't think it's true. I mean, I think rare people ... my experience has been--and I have not traveled in all ... in every Arab country and I don't think I'm an authority on this. I'm a better place than people like Friedman maybe to comment on it but I'm not an authority. But wherever people are frustrated, in my ... in my experience, is with specific policies and with the arrogance. I mean, America ... America as a country, is drunk on power. There's no question about that in my view--and that type of power breeds a certain arrogance that people are understandably critical of. But ... in the Arab world, people are critical of America and its policies, or American policies, and sort of this perceived arrogance of power in Europe in Latin America, in... I mean, all over the world. No one likes a bully.

Q. What do you think the U.S. can do to resolve the problem of terrorism directed against it?

A. I think we have to learn more about our policies throughout the world and how they're perceived and what their direct results are. I think we have to understand much more about where people have legitimate concerns about American policy. We have to understand why it is that it is possible for people to have such rage and fury and even hatred in many, many parts of the world. It's not good enough to say they hate us 'cause we're free. It's not good enough to say they hate us 'cause of what we stand for. It's very easy but it's ... but it's overly simplistic and it doesn't really answer any questions. I think we have to really understand where we've gone wrong with our policy and what, however

these stated goals may have been, what the results of our policies were and we have to, I think, question our leadership and question why, for example, Madeline Albright can talk about five hundred thousand dead Iraqis as an acceptable price to pay for America's interests to be pursued in the Gulf. I mean, why ... first of all, why was that an acceptable position to hold? Why was there not public outcry at that comment? Why has this ... have successive American administrations supported ... supported a policy which has effectively been as impressive a genocide as any genocide I can think of, more than a million people in ten years. I mean, it's just horrific. So why ... I think we have to ask those questions. I think we have to ask what America's role has been in the world for the last fifty years.

Q. Why has nobody asked the questions do you think?

A. People have asked the questions. Unfortunately, it hasn't been the people in power. The people have been asking the questions. I mean, there have been many very articulate essays, and not just from people of Noam Chomsky's stature. Many, many people have been asking the questions but it hasn't been a national exercise yet. And unfortunately, we've had everyone from the President down-- well, not everyone--but many people from the President down saying to question is not American. I mean, Bush said you're either with us or against us. What kind of democracy is that? If you don't agree with me you're against me. And, I mean, you can't debate someone who is ... who doesn't have the same view of you: if you're there with me or against me. That's not what the America that Bush claims to love is about. The America people are so proud of is an America that tolerates free speech and dissent and opposition. I mean, that's the whole ... those are the fundamentals of democracy.

Q. The America I know too, the America I love.

A. Exactly! I'm saying that's that we have as Americans to be proud of and ... unfortunately, the ... the knee jerk reaction since September 11th has been to silence debate and to silence criticism and to not ask the questions and to retreat into this very isolationist and over simplistic: You're either with us or against us, or these things ... this happened because there's evil in the world and evil will always exist. What the hell kind of foreign policy analysis is that? I mean, really? Was the devil responsible in person; that he's going to retreat back underground for a couple of years and then come up ... I mean, come on! So that's my opinion on that one.

Q. Are there any other issues or points that you'd like to comment on that we haven't discussed in the interview?

A. I don't think so.

Q. Okay. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

A. You're more than welcome.