



A Country Called Amreeka: Arab Roots, American Stories

By Alia Malek

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Among the surfeit of narratives about Arabs that have been published in recent years, surprisingly little has been reported on Arabs in America -- an increasingly relevant issue. This book is the most powerful approach imaginable: it is the story of the last forty-plus years of American history, told through the eyes of Arab Americans. It begins in 1963, before major federal legislative changes seismically transformed the course of American immigration forever. Each chapter describes an event in U.S. history -- which may already be familiar to us -- and invites us to live that moment in time in the skin of one Arab American. The chapters follow a timeline from 1963 to the present, and the characters live in every corner of this country.

These are dramatic narratives, describing the very human experiences of love, friendship, family, courage, hate, and success. There are the timeless tales of an immigrant community becoming American, the nostalgia for home, the alienation from a society sometimes as intolerant as its laws are generous. *A Country Called Amreeka's* snapshots allow us the complexity of its characters' lives with an impassioned narrative normally found in fiction.

Read separately, the chapters are entertaining and harrowing vignettes; read together, they add a new tile to the mosaic of our history. We meet fellow Americans of all creeds and colors, among them the Alabama football player who navigates the stringent racial mores of segregated Birmingham, where a church bombing wakes a nation to the need to make America a truly more equal place; the young wife from Ramallah -- now living in Baltimore -- who had to abandon her beautiful home and is now asked by a well-meaning American, "How do you like living in an apartment after living in a tent?"; the Detroit toughs and the potsmoking suburban teenagers, who in different decades become politicized and serious about their heritage despite their own wills; the homosexual man afraid to be gay in the Arab world and afraid to be Arab in America; the two formidable women who wind up working for opposing campaigns in the 2000 presidential election; the Marine fighting in Iraq who meets villagers who ask him, "What are you, an Arab, doing here?" We glimpse how America sees Arabs as much as how Arabs see America. We revisit the

1973 oil embargo that initiated the American perception of all Arabs as oil-rich sheikhs; the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis that heralded the arrival of Middle Eastern Islam in the American consciousness; bombings across three decades in Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, and New York City that bring terrorism to American soil; and both wars in Iraq that have posed Arabs as the enemies of America.

In a post-9/11 world, Arabic names are everywhere in America, but our eyes glaze over them; we sometimes don't know how to pronounce them or understand whence they come. *A Country Called Amreeka* gives us the faces behind those names and tells the story of a community it has become essential for us to understand. We can't afford to be oblivious.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The U.S. has long lauded itself as a nation of immigrants, but some communities have had considerable difficulty weaving themselves into the American tapestry, notably, Arab-Americans. In this superb snapshot of the Americans of Arab-speaking descent, individuals with roots in Jordan, Yemen, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon share their stories and demonstrate the extent to which, even as they play football, work assembly lines and hold public office, they remain shut out of the national narrative. With a remarkable ability to capture her subjects' voices, Malek, a Syrian-American civil rights lawyer, sketches illuminating responses to her question: What does American history look and feel like in the eyes and skin of Arab Americans? There's the Lebanese-American, too dark for 1960s Birmingham; the Palestinian-American surrounded by anti-Arab violence during the Iranian hostage crisis; the Yemeni-American deployed to Iraq with the Marine Corps. In her effort to demonstrate the impact of foreign affairs on American soil, Malek focuses too heavily on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, giving short shrift to other important stories of upheaval, but this is an excellent book, one certain to put right some of the wrongs it catalogues. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

"Like President Obama's first book, *A Country Called Amreeka* explores what it's like to be of two worlds at once...A wonderfully lucid and rational look at 20th century Arab American life. A book like this would be valuable in any era, but particularly now...it's welcome, brave and necessary." --Dave Eggers, *The San Francisco Chronicle*

"...[Fills a] gap in our collective understanding of our own history...a worthwhile read. Richly told and beautifully written, [a] valuable contribution to the American story."—*Political Affairs Magazine*

"...Malek deftly illuminates the individual and collective lives of Arab-Americans in the U.S.." —Kelly Kennedy, *Army Times*

"Alia Malek's impassioned and harrowing set of profiles of Arab-Americans gives vitality and resonance to a cause that is dear to my heart: fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect. Infectiously readable, the profiles in *A Country Called Amreeka* add character and texture to the history of the Arab-American community, challenging every tired stereotype and giving us new insight into what it means to be an Arab-American today. This book gives us the faces behind the names, and tells the story of a community that both enriches and embraces the American fabric. *A Country Called Amreeka*, and the Americans who inhabit it, are remarkable."

--Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, author of *A Leap of Faith: Memoir of an Unexpected Life*

"[A] superb snapshot of the Americans of Arab-speaking descent. [Malek has] a remarkable ability to capture her subjects' voices...An excellent book, one certain to put right some of the wrongs it catalogues."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Malek brings powerfully into focus...the story of the relationship between America and its Arab Americans. As the book progresses through time, a bigger story begins to emerge...An incredible journey." — *Christian Science Monitor*

About the Author

ALIA MALEK is an author and civil rights lawyer. Born in Baltimore to Syrian immigrant parents, she began her legal career as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. After practicing law in the States, Lebanon, and the West Bank, Malek, who has degrees from Johns Hopkins and Georgetown universities, earned her master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. Her reportage has appeared in *Salon*, *The Columbia Journalism Review*, and *The New York Times*. This is her first book.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas O'Brien:

Book is definitely written, printed, or highlighted for everything. You can understand everything you want by a guide. Book has a different type. As you may know that book is important point to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading proficiency was fluently. A guide A Country Called Amreeka: Arab Roots, American Stories will make you to always be smarter. You can feel far more confidence if you can know about every thing. But some of you think which open or reading a book make you bored. It's not make you fun. Why they are often thought like that? Have you trying to find best book or acceptable book with you?

Ruth Goodrich:

Exactly why? Because this A Country Called Amreeka: Arab Roots, American Stories is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap this but latter it will jolt you with the secret it inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who all write the book in such remarkable way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book include such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking way. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the reserve store hurriedly.

James Snider:

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Sarah Porter:

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