



Arab American National Museum

Arab American Involvement in Civil Rights Movements

Description:

- This lesson aims to incorporate Arab American activists and organizers into the cultural history of the civil rights struggle in the US. This unit can be incorporated into existing curricula, wherein it enriches the civil rights story while bringing attention to how Arab Americans have been and continue to be important players and contributors to the face of US social and political activism and thereby to the face of the US nation. It also gives global (Middle Eastern) and local (Detroit and Dearborn) context for the unfolding of the civil rights and labor movements in the US.
- This unit occurs in three parts. The first part provides background information on key Arab American contributions to civil rights struggles. It assumes prior knowledge of the civil rights movement. The second invites the classroom to the Arab American National Museum for a more personalized account. The third is a follow up activity that asks students to create a creative or educational piece about any key civil rights activist or moment. It can work as a conclusion to the unit on civil rights entirely, or be more specific to Arab American contributions according to your need.
- HSCEs and ELAs: USHG 8.3.1, 8.3.4, K1.3, K 1.5, P1. 1.1, P1.1.3, P1.1.4, CE 1.3.1, CE 2.1.2, CE 3.1.7, CE 3.1.9, CE 3.1.10
- Common Core: RL2, RI2, RI3, W2, W4, W7, RH2, WHST1, WHST7, WHST8, SL 1

Part One

Materials:

- Essays from Alia Malek's *A Country Called Amreeka*. Included as PDF.
- Brief Elegy for Nagi Daifallah. Included as PDF.
- Butcher paper
- Colored Markers

Procedures:

- Assign the students the three essays listed above.
- In small groups, ask the students to generate a timeline of events occurring in the Middle East and in the US from the Malek narratives and Daifallah elegy
- While they compile their dates, sketch the major time points of the civil rights movement in the US on the board—these should be familiar to students from prior lessons.
- When students have completed their task, ask them, from the beginning of the time lines, to point to important moments of convergence. Ask them to speculate on the significance of each convergent moment, and why it may or may not have been influential.
- Ask students what connections, similarities, and differences they see between the Arab Americans they read about and what they know about the civil rights movement. What are some overlapped or shared values?

- Malek’s narratives in particular encourage readers to consider the relationship between Arabs and other ethnic minorities in the US. Ask students to consider how organizing for civil rights and labor unionizing might have brought together groups.
- Ask the students if the collaboration between groups makes sense? Why or why not? What issues might bring together these groups? Can they imagine issues that would only be of concern to Arabs, or rather, unique problems facing Arab Americans?
- What was surprising, exciting, or thought provoking in the narratives about Sammie, Alex, and Nagi?
- Why is it important to include Arab American activism in the narrative about rights and organizing in the US? In what way can we see the importance of Arab American presence in rights discourse in the present day?

Part Two

Location: AANM, Second Floor, Making an Impact Gallery, Activists Wall

Procedures:

- Allow students to peruse the contributions gallery and ask them to specifically focus on the activist profiles. You might also visit Nagi Daifallah’s profile in the “Coming to America” gallery since he will be familiar to them via their readings.
- Ask students to respond, formally or informally, to the following questions:
 - What “causes” are Arab Americans involved in?
 - How and why are they relevant to other minorities or other groups in the US?
 - Are their activism only local, global, or both?
 - What is the connection between global and local activism?
 - Who is particularly notable/exciting/unexpected? Why?

Part Three

Materials:

- Access to research materials
- Internet/library access

Procedures:

- Ask your students to select one figure from the unit on civil rights broadly or this unit on Arab Americans specifically. This figure can be well known, or s/he can be relatively unknown (an aunt or uncle for example). The person can be contemporary or historical/ Ask them to research this figure’s involvement with the civil rights or similar struggle in the US. They may conduct interviews if possible.
- Have students write an analytic essay relating the figure’s work and her/his importance to the civil rights struggle, especially highlighting any cross-ethnic or racial solidarity work.

A COUNTRY CALLED
AMREEKA

Arab Roots, American Stories

Alia Malek

Free Press

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY



FREE PRESS

A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2009 by Alia Malek

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address

Free Press Subsidiary Rights Department,
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020
First Free Press hardcover edition October 2009

FREE PRESS and colophon are
trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at
1-866-506-1949 or business@simonandschuster.com

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event.
For more information or to book an event
contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049
or visit our website at www.simonsspeakers.com

Designed by Paul Dippolito

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Malek, Alia.

A country called Amreeka: Arab roots, American stories / Alia Malek.

p. cm.

1. Arab Americans—Case studies. 2. Arab Americans—Social conditions—Case studies.

3. Immigrants—United States—Case studies. I. Title.

E184.A65M35 2009

973'04927—dc22 2008055091

ISBN 978-1-4165-8972-3

ISBN 978-1-4165-9268-6 (ebook)

To

Leyla, for believing

Rana, for reading

Hussam, for faith

Samar, for common sense

Americans spared little attention for the war in the Middle East; after all, U.S. troops were fighting another war in Vietnam. By July 1967, there were a total of 675,000 U.S. ground forces in the Asian country. American troops were also deployed in the homeland, as racial unrest saw American cities such as Detroit and Newark go up in flames in 1967. Other cities, like Baltimore, would burn the following year, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

But the Arab world remained stunned by the defeat of the combined Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian armies. Arabs in America and Americans of Arab descent had also been bewildered by the incredible defeat; the occupation by Israel of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights directly affected them, their families, their property rights, and their homelands. They were similarly confounded by the complete absence of any Arab or Palestinian perspective from the mainstream American discourse and foreign policy discussions. It begged the necessity for a national presence, organized around far more than just religious or fraternal concerns.

In 1967, the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) was formed as a nonprofit educational and cultural organization to promote better understanding between Arabs and Americans. Largely as a response to the unchallenged influence of the pro-Israel lobby in U.S. Middle East policy, the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) was formed in 1972.

In the Arab world, one of most significant consequences of the June defeat was that it destroyed the credibility of the nation-states that had sought to be the patrons of the Palestinian people, and it weakened

Nasser's power significantly. He soon died, in 1970, and was replaced by his vice president, Anwar al-Sadat.

The way was opened for Yasser Arafat, who advocated guerrilla warfare and who successfully sought to make the PLO a fully independent organization under his control. The PLO's base of operations was Jordan, effectively establishing a state within a state, until September 1970, known as Black September, when King Hussein cracked down on and expelled the PLO. The PLO reconstituted in Lebanon, and continued from there to carry out its cross-border attacks on Israel.

At the Summer Olympic Games in Munich in 1972, a militant splinter group that used the name Black September, and had mostly focused its efforts on attacks against Jordan, carried out its most infamous operation. The group infiltrated the Olympic Village in Munich, taking members of the Israeli team hostage and eventually killing eleven of them.

In response to the events in Munich, President Nixon launched Operation Boulder on September 25, 1972. It was headed by Secretary of State William Rogers and involved the State Department, the CIA, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the FBI. The initiative targeted Arabs living and studying in America. They were interrogated, photographed, and fingerprinted by FBI and immigration officials. Their families, friends, neighbors, and employers were interviewed by FBI agents. Their visa applications were subjected to a mandatory waiting period while they were checked out through United States, Israeli, and European intelligence sources. Profiles of community activists were developed, and Arab—especially Palestinian—political and nonpolitical associations, such as the AALG, came under heavy surveillance.

The intimidation resulting from these efforts discouraged many Arab Americans from participating in any kind of lawful, organized community-building activities.

In 1967–1973, political upheaval throughout the Middle East hastened emigration, and 59,035 Arabs chose to immigrate to the United States. Palestinians and Jordanians were well represented at 14,504, as Israel had annexed and occupied areas in which they lived. It is important to note here that after 1967, U.S. immigration figures included

Palestinians in Jordanian totals, and they account for the majority of those figures. Israel also seized Egyptian territory, which, combined with the pessimism felt after the defeat and death of Nasser, helped persuade 13,529 Egyptians to immigrate to the United States. While many thought not all of the 22,398 Lebanese and Syrians in this period came under the rubric of family reunification, Egyptians had not before immigrated to the States in numbers and came under the provision for skilled professionals.

In this same period, 5,127 Iraqi immigrants arrived, including Iraqi Christians joining family members who had immigrated in the years prior to the 1965 immigration law change, as well as skilled Muslim and Christian professionals. Political upheaval also occurred outside the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In late 1967, South Yemen gained independence from Great Britain and quickly began experiencing the growing pains of nation building. Of the remaining 3,477 Arab immigrants to come, most were Yemenis.

Many of those who came were drawn by the freedoms and opportunities the United States offered, at the same time that they disagreed with U.S. policies in their homelands.

Early in 1973, the Vietnam War came to an end. But the 1967 war in the Middle East was not yet resolved; Israel still maintained control over the territory it had annexed during the war. The UN Security Council had called for the return of Arab territories occupied by Israel, but six years had passed. Diplomatic means had failed to return the land on which Israel had already begun to build Jewish-only settlements. In the United States, the desire to have a more active role in affecting U.S. Middle East policy began to bring the different waves of Arab immigration together into one larger community that transcended national origin and religious lines.

OCTOBER 17, 1973



© DR. ALBERT-ABDALLAH ROSSETTE HARP

Dissent

On the Monday afternoon of July 24, 1967, as Alan Amen and his pals Sammy and Johnny rode in Sammy's '63 blue Plymouth Fury down Michigan Avenue in Detroit, all Alan could think was, this shit is crazy.

Alan and the boys had come up from their neighborhood in the South-end of Dearborn to see for themselves what was going on in the city. In the early hours of Sunday morning, Detroit cops—tipped off that a black uprising was about to set fire to their town—had raided a blind pig (speak-easy) in a black neighborhood. An informant had passed the word, for 50 cents, that the after-hours club was where the havoc was being hatched. Though the police had found nothing of the sort when they arrived, they decided to arrest everyone there. While the cops waited for paddy

wagons to transport the more than 80 people they were detaining, a crowd of nearly 200, angry and frustrated, had gathered to watch.

By the time the sun had risen, the looting and rioting had begun. Those who had gotten up and gone to church that Sunday morning saw stores, homes, and cars on fire, and some even thought Judgment Day had come. Black leaders considered to be moderate, like Congressman John Conyers, offered to help police calm the situation, but calm was not to be had. Even Detroit Tigers left-fielder Willie Horton, still in uniform after his game, had driven on Sunday through the riots, stood on a car, and pleaded for peace. But the crowd stayed angry.

Alan had watched from home on TV on Sunday as a hundred city blocks retched in turmoil. Fires had hollowed out brick houses from the inside and lit them up like jack-o-lanterns, and firemen like his uncle Don, who were trying to extinguish the flames, had to be protected by cops and guardsmen from rioters pelting them with rocks and debris. That evening, as night had fallen, Governor Romney mobilized the Michigan National Guard, and soon the first of 3,000 mostly white and heavily armed men with little training in crowd control arrived to patrol black neighborhoods. Before 8 p.m. curfew had been instated, but thousands were on the streets, made darker by the guardsmen and cops who, jittery with rumors of snipers, had nervously shot out the streetlamps.

Horton's team, the Detroit Tigers, scheduled to play Monday and Tuesday at Tiger Stadium, had their games moved to Baltimore. The baseball team was Alan's favorite of all the Detroit sports teams, and their stadium had better be all right.

Driving now along Michigan Avenue, Alan, Sammy, and Johnny slowed to peer down 12th Street, the heart of the riot, before speeding up to make sure Tiger Stadium was still standing. Relieved to see that it did not seem in danger, they turned the car down Trumbull.

From the back seat of the car, Alan stared out his open window as they careened no faster than 25 miles per hour down the center of the streets, the sides blocked with burned-out or burning cars, furniture, and debris. Buildings still on fire sent up a thick black smoke, and the sound of fire cracked from behind broken windows. Stores had vomited up their merchandise, what was left of it, onto the streets. Residential neighborhoods were lined with roofless, gutted homes, only their masonry facades still

standing, and their possessions—furniture, clothes, toys—lay mutilated on the sidewalks in front. The place looked like the ruins of a civilization long gone.

Tons of people were on the streets. The Westinghouse Warehouse was being looted just as Alan and the guys approached it and the radio began reporting it. A crowd of people ran back and forth from the warehouse to the street, grabbing their loot and passing it off to people in cars before the cops got there.

Sammy steered the car to Milwaukee Street toward Woodward Avenue.

As they drove down Milwaukee, they began to see more and more cops. They were approaching General Motors Headquarters—*Jeez*, Alan thought, they were everywhere all of a sudden, where they had been scant just a minute before. People were running across the street, and the police were grabbing black men by the shirt collars and throwing them in cop cars.

Alan and the boys decided to get the hell out of there. In the Southend, there were two things you had to learn growing up: how to fight and when to run. They didn't want to be anywhere near the cops or the cops anywhere near their business. Sammy and Johnny were regular tough guys, and Alan had had a run-in of his own with the police one night when he got pulled over for jibber-jabbering with a lady in the red-light district.

As soon as there was open road, they sped their way back to Dearborn. Later that Monday afternoon and at Governor Romney's request, President Lyndon B. Johnson sent Detroit 4,200 paratroopers—some of whom had just come back from Vietnam. They went into the city with unloaded weapons, swelling the number of law enforcement men to 17,000.

Monday night, Alan decided to keep his distance. He watched Detroit burn instead from his family's front porch in the Southend, the poorest neighborhood in Dearborn, where three square miles of modest homes stood hidden in the shadow of the Ford Rouge Plant and its Big Eight rising smokestacks.

This madness might be new, but for Alan the shit had been hitting the fan for a while now.

It had all started when the government took his older brother Ronnie and sent him to Vietnam.

In 1963, Ronnie had graduated high school and started college, getting a deferment from the draft and the Vietnam War. To pay his way through

school, he had taken a full-time job that summer in a steel-fabricating plant that supplied Ford Motor Company. Ronnie had worked the steel-shearing machine, which cut large pieces of sheet metal the right size to punch out a car door. While working his shift in the summer of '64, a bar gauge crushed his hand, shattering bones, severing tendons, and bursting open his palm. He underwent several surgeries to put his hand back together and lost a year of school recuperating. In June of '65 he was able to reenroll in school as a full-time student to start that September. Then in July, he was drafted.

Ronnie went straight to the draft board with proof of his college enrollment and all his medical documents; he was still scheduled for one more surgery. The lady there reassured him that he was due to be called up in October and that his college deferment would be reinstated by then. Instead, he received orders a few weeks later to report to Ft. Wayne. He showed up as ordered, but with several pounds of medical documents and with only 30 percent usage of his crippled hand.

At his physical, as Ronnie stood there in his underwear, the doctor listening to his lungs asked how long he had been smoking.

"Never once in my life," Ronnie told him, learning only then that growing up in the embrace of the Rouge plant meant its waste had been deposited in his lungs and, he guessed, in the lungs of every other kid who had ever grown up in the Southend.

But it had not mattered; eight hours later, Ronnie had walked out the back door onto a bus to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to start boot camp.

From there, they sent Ronnie to Aberdeen, Maryland, for advanced training; he stayed on and become an instructor. After his training, he had come home on a weekend pass and married his girlfriend, and they returned together to Aberdeen. She soon had gotten pregnant, and a few weeks after his daughter was born, Ronnie was given orders to go to the Mekong Delta.

Before Ronnie had gotten screwed by the government, and Alan was left living every day with the thought "Where the hell is he at?" Alan had planned to boost his draft as soon as he graduated high school in 1965. Their uncles had served in the air force and the army, and Alan was proud of them.

He had truly believed that when the United States fought in a war, it

was on the side of good; after all, the country had fought fascism in World War II only after a despicable sneak attack by a terrible, vicious, and evil enemy. Now we were under attack by a new enemy, Alan believed, and if we all didn't fight the Commies over there, the fight would end up here.

But it didn't make much sense to Alan that a guy like Ronnie with a busted hand should even be in the army, let alone in Vietnam. So he had started reading about Vietnam and had taken a sociology course in college, and by the time Ronnie got to the Mekong Delta earlier that year, Alan already thought the whole thing was bullshit.

And Ronnie made it clear to Alan what he thought of the war. Ronnie had written that he didn't know what the hell he was doing in Vietnam or what the hell the Army was doing there. He had told Alan not to let them draft him. If he got drafted, he should go to Canada, where they speak English. Ronnie had told his little brother, "If you end up in Vietnam, I will shoot you myself."

Nevertheless, it felt strange to Alan that Ronnie was off fighting somewhere now and Alan was not getting his back, a lesson he had learned early when he got a whipping from his father when they had been kids.

Walking back from Salina Elementary School a decade before, a kid had come up to Ronnie and told him he wanted to fight him. Ronnie had handed Alan his books and told him to take them home. When Alan got there, his father, who worked the midnight shift at Ford as a janitor, was waiting as usual, wearing his slippers, smoking his cigarette, and having his coffee in his Ford Motor Company cup.

"Where's your brother?" he asked Alan.

"He's going to fight a kid," Alan shrugged.

Without changing into shoes, their father ran out and came back with Ronnie in tow, smacking him with the slipper as they came in the back door.

Their father then looked at Alan, and said, "Come here."

"What?" Alan protested. He knew he was going to get it. "I didn't fight!"

He then had gotten it worse than Ronnie.

"Don't you ever let your brother fight and you leave him alone!" his father had said. "Now get up in your room."

In the Southend, they were all like brothers, and they all had one

another's back. It was the kind of place where if one of the guys came into the pool hall and said someone was about to jump him, the other guys would go—no questions asked. When Alan had visited Ronnie at boot camp—the first time they had ever been separated—he had realized that, *Jeez*, Ronnie was on his own, he didn't have anyone.

Alan had gotten Ronnie's letter telling him to go to Canada if he were drafted that June, around the time the *other* war was happening in the Old Country, between Israel and the Arabs. Their mother was always railing against the Vietnam War. "What the hell are we doing in Vietnam?" she would say. During the June fighting in the Old Country, she had also complained, "Look what they're doing to the Arabs. Again! They are not going to be happy until they have all the Middle East!"

At first, in Alan's family, they thought maybe a war of liberation had begun there, and that the Palestinians would soon get their land and houses back. Then, as Alan watched the Israelis dancing on the Syrian Golan Heights, he felt immediately dejected, and he hated their celebration.

Alan had watched how the American networks covered the war in June on channels 2, 4, and 7 and then switched to channel 9, which came from Canada, across the Detroit River. Something about the Canadian coverage seemed different to Alan: U.S. news talked about Israel defending itself while the Canadian outlets reported Israel seizing territory and killing civilians. Alan was confused. Weren't we—Americans and Canadians—more or less the same?

And earlier, in July, he had just received another letter from Ronnie, written a month before in June, telling him the scuttlebutt was that his helicopter gunship outfit might be getting shipped out to the Middle East, on the side of the Israelis.

As if it weren't bad enough that they had taken Ronnie to Vietnam, the idea that they would take him to make war on his own people really bothered and confused Alan. Things kept catching him by surprise, and he was sick of being ignorant; he wanted to know what all this crap was about.

Alan now sat on the porch, facing Detroit just a few blocks away. Their neighbor from across the street, Millie—an Italian from Brooklyn who had married a Yemeni guy—was there with her son Tony. Alan's sister Sandra kept coming in and out of the house, and Alan was sitting next to Ronnie's wife Alice on the porch swing. Alice had been picnicking the day

before at the state fairgrounds, enjoying the summer Sunday afternoon with about a hundred other people from the Shiite mosque when they received word the riots were spreading. She hadn't been able to make it back to her mother's in Highland Park, so she had come to Ron's parents' place instead with her young daughter.

Together they now watched the orange glow of the dusk sky; twenty-nine fires were out of control that night in Detroit.

Is this what Ronnie saw in Vietnam? Alan wondered. It sure looked similar to the newsreels they watched in the States.

They stared as the black smoke rose from the building casualties. The dark haze hovered above Detroit much more ominously than the smoke the Ford Rouge Plant puffed into the Southend every day.

The Rouge sat not 300 yards behind their house and 100 yards behind the elementary school all the neighborhood kids attended. This was the Southend. Alan wanted to get out of here, finish college, and buy a nice house in a neighborhood where you didn't have to tape your windows shut to keep the soot from coming through or where if you left your car outside, it wouldn't turn a rusty brown from the fly ash.

The Old Man himself, Henry Ford, had built the town of Dearborn, carefully planning who would live where. For hourly workers, there was East Dearborn, while West Dearborn was reserved for management. For blacks, Ford created what he imagined to be a model town. He named it Inkster. For the poorer new immigrants who had come from across the ocean and the hillbillies who had traveled across the Mason-Dixon, there was the Southend, so close to the factories that they could walk to work.

Ford Motor Company had brought them all to this neighborhood, the Southend. It lay on the wrong side of a few tracks of the Ford Railroad, and from the west, where management lived, it was completely obscured from view by the Rouge. The Southend was a neighborhood full of immigrants, their children, their grandchildren, and even their great-grandchildren. They had all come on the promise of a job and pay. They were varied nationalities; Italians, Poles, Romanians, Serbians, Armenians, and Syrians were among them. The Syrians came mostly from villages that in 1943 had become part of the newly formed Lebanon. But only after Lebanese actor Danny Thomas got his own TV show with a Lebanese character did they stop calling themselves "Syrians" and become "Lebanese."

Yemeni merchant marines who had worked ships that had traveled from Aden to Detroit's port came to worship at the Sunni mosque on Vernor on their liberty days. Some eventually stayed, and now 10 percent of the Southend had origins in the Arabic-speaking world. But those Yemenis were single men or had wives in Yemen whom they were supporting. Alan and the other Lebanese socialized with them mostly only in the coffeehouses on Dix Avenue.

To get jobs at Ford, many had anglicized their Arabic names, given their children English names, and hidden their "Hussens" and "Muhammads" in their middle names. So "Amin" became "Armen," and "Ronnie" and "Alan" were used, instead of "Ali" and "Abdel Hassan," which their parents stopped using even at home once their children started school. And so here they were.

Alan's father was in his twenty-sixth year as a janitor at Ford; Ronnie had sheared steel for Ford car doors for a year before his hand got crushed, and Alan had signed up with the company in the summer of 1965, during Senior Week. He had already worked three days by the night of his prom.

Even though the job was meant to just last the summer, Alan had thought he would never last two days, let alone be working his third summer now. He had wanted to quit after the first day, but there was no way to do that and still live in his father's house.

That first summer, Alan had worked eleven hours a day, six days a week, on the assembly line in the passenger trim section. It was miserable—unbearably hot and noisy. His station was right below the bake oven, where a car's metal shell was cooked after being spray painted. When it was 90 degrees outside, Alan would watch the floor thermometer hit 123. There were no scheduled water breaks, which did ease the fact that there were no bathroom breaks either. What they did have was eleven minutes off in the morning and nineteen in the afternoon, and the relief guy who took over Alan's job during those breaks timed it to the second.

So if Alan had a thirst that needed to be quenched at any other point during the shift, he would have to shave eight seconds off the sixty-three seconds he had to do his part on the cars as they were coming down. That gave him just enough time to run to the fountain, drink, and make it back for the next car. Above the fountain, there was a sign reminding the workers—who didn't have time for water built into their schedule—to take salt tablets, which were available in the dispenser by the fountain.

In Alan's first month, he saw a man drop dead. Alan had been headed to Gate 4 to say hello to his father, who came on when Alan got off. Alan came out of the plant and found the day blazing hot; a guy in front of him fell all of a sudden, hit the ground, and began convulsing. Rouge paramedics—the plant had its own ambulance and fire department—rushed over, placed the guy onto a stretcher, and worked on him. Alan watched them cover the man with a sheet and was horrified as they pulled it over his face.

That day Alan ran all the way to Gate 4, and when his father saw him, he had immediately asked, "What's wrong with you?"

"They're dropping dead here," he panted. "I gotta get out of here!"

His father had laughed and told him to go home.

At least with these riots now, they didn't have to go into work!

But just like how Ron had disappeared, the Southend was disappearing from beneath him in more bullshit, called Urban Renewal. More like urban removal, Alan thought. The city was quietly buying up their low-income houses and clearing them so they could convert the Southend into an industrial zone. Dearborn's Mayor Hubbard wanted a buffer between Dearborn and Detroit, or rather Detroit's black folk. Besides, plenty of Dearborn's good people already thought the Southend was Detroit and didn't really care anyway what happened to the greasers and their factory rat children.

But it would all be moot, Alan thought, if blacks came in and burnt the Southend down all around them, as Mayor Hubbard was warning. Hubbard, who called black folk "niggers" and blamed the riot on Martin Luther King, had put the fear of God in them all. On the porch, Alan was afraid of what would happen to them in the chaos.

Hubbard had run for mayor on the promise that no blacks would ever live in Dearborn. He was now in his twenty-fifth year in office. Just two years ago he had been indicted under a federal civil rights statute for allowing Dearborn police to stand by while a crowd stoned the house of a resident who was mistakenly believed to have sold his property to a black family. When the jury acquitted him, Mayor Hubbard treated them all to a steak dinner.

Alan had had his own run-in with the mayor in 1965, as a senior in high school. For social studies class, Alan had invited a Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) representative to come discuss voter registration efforts in the South. Unbeknownst to Alan, his social

studies teacher wasn't as cool as Alan had thought. He actually invited Mayor Hubbard to come in and give the other perspective. The day the mayor came to their class, the teacher made Alan go greet the mayor at the door of the school.

As Alan escorted the mayor to the classroom, the mayor asked Alan his name and when he was born. Then in the classroom, Mayor Hubbard had presented the case for segregation. Alan had been disgusted. He had also received a birthday card from the mayor every year since.

But Alan was still afraid that in this impending mayhem, the mayor might be right that something could happen to him, his family, his girlfriend, or his neighborhood. The Southend, after all, bordered Detroit, and they were separated only by an invisible force field that ran along shared arteries like Dix Avenue.

And of course Alan wouldn't be surprised if blacks hated Dearborn. Blacks who worked at the Rouge—nearly a third of the employees—knew not to even think about living in Dearborn; in fact they went well out of their way to go around Dearborn to get home after their shifts, rather than drive through it.

Hubbard had said he wasn't going to let anyone come in from Detroit and harm Dearborn. But Alan wasn't going to count on Hubbard to help the Southend; if anyone came near his house, or family, or girlfriend, *he'd* be the one to give them a fight.

As Alan swung lazily back and forth on the porch swing, a loud BOOM! made everyone jump up.

"A gunshot! A gunshot! They are firing!"

Alan found himself bumping into the others in the dark, trying to get into the house first. Alice shoved her daughter into the arms of Sandra, who was already in the house, and screamed at her to protect her.

Before he got in the house, Alan remembered himself. "I'll go check and see what it is," he declared.

The women pleaded with him, "Be careful!" "Be careful!"

Around back, Alan saw what had happened. Their neighbor had dropped a heavy chest of drawers as he attempted to move it.

Goddamn, Alan thought. Why should I feel scared? He was sick of stuff sneaking up on him.

Alan decided to head over to his girlfriend Karen's house, about five

blocks away. She lived with her mother, her sister, and her brother-in-law, but they were all away on a vacation. Alan's family pleaded with him not to go, but he wanted to make sure Karen was safe. And he relished being able to spend some time with her in an empty house!

He arrived at Karen's house to find her startled: someone had come by and banged on her door. She was also not alone; Ruby, her best friend, was there as well. Karen, who knew how to shoot, wanted Alan to load up her brother-in-law's 12-gauge over-and-under shotgun.

He set up the rifle for her and hung around for a couple of hours, but Ruby wasn't going anywhere so he headed up to Dix Avenue, the main drag in the Southend.

When Alan got up to Dix, as night crept to midnight, he found at least a hundred other guys standing around on the street, as they did on any warm summer night. Alan joined up with a bunch of his friends standing in front of the pool hall, where the older guys hung after they graduated from the spot in front of the drugstore next door.

Guys were smoking and shooting the shit. The National Guard had been bivouacked in and were stationed at Patton Park, right up on Dix, but on the Detroit side. Across Dix—a boulevard of several lanes—two guardsmen Jeeps were parked.

Some of the toughs decided to light up some firecrackers.

Ba ba ba burn! Ba ba ba burn, the firecrackers crackled.

The Jeeps wheeled around and came over. "What are you guys doing?" the guardsmen asked, machine guns pointed. "What's going on?"

The Southend guys hollered back:

"Don't worry about us!"

"All's fine here, go back where you came from, *boys*."

"Go back to your tents!"

"We can take care of ourselves."

On October 6, 1973, Egypt, Syria, and Israel were at war. Again.

Today, on October 14, 1973, Alan and the others were doing something about it.

It may have taken only six days to fight the last one over there, but in Dearborn they had spent the last six years obsessing over it. They had

discussed it, dissected it, and deconstructed it from every angle while hanging out in coffeehouses on Dix Avenue. They condemned Israel for being colonialist and expansionist; mourned Nasser and his failures; proclaimed Jordan's King Hussein a sellout; excoriated the Saudis as decadent monarchs who were morally repugnant; and idolized the *Fida'iyyin*, the Palestinian guerrillas who had decided no Arab government could deliver them their rights. They had to count on themselves.

It was a kind of group therapy.

Neither Alan nor any of the others were going to sit this one out, like they had six years ago, when they had been stunned, confused, and shamed by the defeat, the American official reaction to the war, and the portrayal of the Arabs. They had been no better than schoolboys then, silent, only raising their voices in shock among one another, but not sounding much more than a whimper outside.

But things had changed since the summer of '67, when both the Middle East and Detroit had last burned. This time Alan planned to do more about it than just take a joy ride around the ruins.

Detroit had not recovered from the violence. The city's population had dropped by 200,000; nearly 2,000 retail businesses were gone; and over 50 million dollars in property had been destroyed. Even Motown Records—Motown!—had quit Detroit in 1972.

Ronnie had come home in August of '67, so darkened by the Vietnamese sun that Alan had walked right past him at the airport until Ronnie had hollered out, "Where the hell you going?"

Alan himself was married and had a child now. He and Karen had gotten engaged right after Ronnie had come home. When Karen's mother heard the news, she told her daughter that if she didn't get married by a Catholic priest, she wasn't going to come.

When Alan told his parents, they responded that if he didn't get married by an imam, as a Muslim, not to bother inviting them.

So in the summer of '68, they eloped in Dearborn, honeymooning for a few nights at the Ramada Inn off I-94. They had never spent a night together before.

And in the Southend, urban renewal/removal had been brutal. Since 1967, the city had razed another 486 houses. In his thirty-first year as

mayor, Hubbard had forced Southenders to sell their houses to the city of Dearborn by using a variety of tactics. The city had refused to grant residents permits to upgrade their homes; had classified any building less than sixteen feet from the rear lot to be substandard, regardless of the condition of the house; had required the installation of items not required by the building code; had actually contributed to the pollution in the area by selling property to the Levy Asphalt Company and Mercier Brick Company; had not placed city-owned lots back on the public market as done in other parts of Dearborn; and had put signs on the vacant houses that read "Free at Your Risk; Take Any Part of the House."

Alan had never had illusions about Hubbard being a racist, but in the last six years, Alan had a much clearer understanding of what Hubbard thought of his "white niggers" in the Southend.

But Southenders had started to fight back. The multiethnic residents came together as the South East Dearborn Community Council, an organization in which Alan's mother, Katherine, had already become involved. Katherine, who was born in Dearborn, came from a long line of strong women.

Her grandmother and grandfather—Alan's great-grandparents—had emigrated from Lebanon to Mexico and had started a family there. Around 1910, they had decided to move to the United States. While pregnant with her second daughter, Katherine's grandmother, Bazaar, came alone ahead of her husband and his brother to set up a home in Highland Park, Michigan, where Ford built his Model Ts and As. She soon gave birth to Zainab, Katherine's mother—Alan's grandmother.

The men had followed shortly from Mexico by train. Once inside the States, somewhere in Texas, bandits had boarded the train, shooting the men to death and stealing their Ottoman gold coins. On account of the coins, the newspaper had reported their deaths as the murder of two Turks. Alan's great-grandmother never missed a beat. Her daughter, Alan's grandmother, gorgeous and wild Zainab, had children by three men and divorced two of them. And it was Alan's mother who long ago had taught him it was just fine to question authority.

In seventh grade, Alan had come home and asked his mother, "What is a Mohammedan?"

"Why are you asking?" she had replied, stopping her cooking.

"I'm doing my social studies homework," Alan had said. "And I think I'm a Mohammedan."

"No, you're not one," his mother had answered sternly. "You worship God and only God, not his prophet. Your textbook is wrong."

In those days Alan believed his teachers, and textbooks were infallible. The truth about Mohammedans had disturbed that reassuring order to his world.

Alan's father, on the other hand, never got involved in the Southend activities—he was the kind of person who believed you couldn't fight City Hall. Thus Katherine had instead conscripted her son Alan in 1967, taking him to meetings so he could find out what was going on and so he could start helping. The following year, he had become treasurer of the community council, and he had been president since 1970.

Then in 1971, the Council had sued the City of Dearborn in federal court. Alan's mother had been the named plaintiff in the case *Amien v. The City of Dearborn*. Many others were afraid to have their names associated with the case because of fear of Hubbard's retaliation. Their office, which Alan was paying for with his unemployment check, had already been burned down. The mayor had also finally stopped sending Alan birthday cards.

Just two months ago in August, the court had announced its decision that the city's tactics *did* constitute the taking of property without due process of law. It had ordered the city to halt any further acquisition of property in the area and to allow the more than 300 homeowners to sue for the difference between the price paid by the city and a price later determined to be the fair market value of the property.

The city was already working on its appeal, both in court and in public opinion. Hubbard's people were telling the rest of Dearborn that the Southenders were both sabotaging good city planning and about to cost them all millions of dollars.

Alan and the council countered by meeting with church groups and civic associations outside the Southend to explain what was happening to their neighborhood. Before the court decision in their favor, no one would listen to them or help them in their fight. Inside the Southend, they were educating people about filing claims and getting their money back.

Alan had no hopes of actually *saving* the Southend—Ford Motor Company had designs on the land and Hubbard was nearly invincible. But if they were going to get tossed out of the place that for many had been their only home in America, then he wanted fair treatment and a little bit of justice.

Alan wanted it enough that when his employer, an accounting firm—headed by a good friend of Hubbard's—gave him the choice to give up the Council or his job, Alan chose to give up his job, and his paycheck. The three of them—Alan, Karen, and their four-year-old son Sam—were living off Karen's salary as a nurse. Alan didn't feel too good about that.

At the same time the Council was suing the city, they were also working on getting one of their own—a Southender—elected to the city council. Alan was convinced they needed to have a voice at city council meetings. Begging them all these years to do the right thing had been pointless. No one had the guts to disagree with Hubbard.

They had decided to run Helen Okdi Atwell, the outspoken secretary of the South East Council and a divorced mother of eight. She was also a Lebanese, and Alan was her campaign manager; she had already cleared the primaries.

And since 1967, the Southend itself was changing as it was disappearing. While some folks were moving out to Detroit or wherever else they could find housing, many more Arabs had arrived. By 1973, there were 85,000 Arabs and Arab Americans in the Detroit area; the vast majority were citizens.

Turmoil in the Middle East—namely the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the fight for Yemeni independence—meant Yemenis and Palestinians had been pouring into Detroit and Dearborn. The metropolitan Detroit area was a natural place for them to come, not only for its Arab-American community, but also for all the factory jobs available in the wake of young American men being sent to Vietnam.

For the new arrivals—many of whom spoke little English, were in a state of trauma, and had little bearing in this new place—the Southenders, who looked like Arabs but spoke with the flat Midwestern accent of a native, taught them how it worked here.

But it was what the new arrivals had that Alan and many other Arab outlanders wanted: information—firsthand experience of what had happened in the Middle East in '67, and a way to believe in pan-Arabism even after Nasser's promises had proven empty. Few knew for themselves the villages from where their ancestors had come, few spoke Arabic, or publicly used their Arabic middle names, but everyone in the Southend had their Old Country—whether it was Poland or Italy or Romania—and that tortured part of the world was theirs.

And those who came from Palestine told a very different story from that told by the American media about what was happening in their homeland under occupation. On Michigan campuses, Arab student organizations showed movies, held teach-ins, and invited speakers, trying to educate both Arab Americans and Americans as to what their reality was like.

Through this exchange of information he experienced while hanging out at Kamel's restaurant, the coffeehouses, and the pool hall on Dix, Alan had been learning his heritage and his history right. Since '67, Alan and the others had been getting educated.

So when this latest war happened, meetings were immediately called and the ad hoc Arab-American Coordinating Committee was formed. The committee pooled together different Arab organizations in the metropolitan area, including the National Association of Arab Americans, Iraqi-Chaldean Association of Michigan, Jordanian Club of Detroit, Arab-American Congress for Palestine, United Holy Land, various student groups, and Islamic groups. They met at the hall of the Hashmi Society, which had been founded by the immigrants from the Tibnine and Jball villages and which used to serve as the Shiite mosque before the new one on Joy Road was built in 1962.

Just five days before, on October 9, the groups had called a press conference. A local television broadcast had announced that there was "no action" from the Arab community over the war. At the press conference, the groups had let Detroiters know they did have a reaction and exactly that it was.

They had denounced the U.S.'s unconditional financial, political, diplomatic, and military support of Israel. They had deplored the media's rabid anti-Arab slant and its characterization of the conflict as one between "Arab" and "Jew." To them, this was overly simplistic and

designed to obscure the political and economic basis of the conflict—namely the Palestinian dispossession of their homeland, making them stateless refugees. They also had proclaimed that the Arab nations were engaged in a fight to get back *their* territory, occupied by Israel since 1967.

The next day, a teach-in was held at Wayne State University.

But it was today's action, organized by Alan and the others, that he believed would have the most impact.

Right before this latest war began, community activists had discovered that in 1967, their local branch of the United Auto Workers (UAW), the largest local and home to 15,000 Arab and Arab-American auto workers, had bought \$330,000 worth of Israeli bonds. The decision had been made without rank-and-file approval, but with the money raised from their own dues. Additionally, the UAW as a whole had bought over \$750,000 worth of the bonds. Moreover, their yield was minimal and had essentially constituted a long-term loan to Israel.

The committee had decided that some of their actions in response to this new war would have to focus on the bonds and call out the UAW. Through leaflets and word of mouth, they got the word out to Arab auto workers. Many of them were already ready to rumble, as it had been a hot summer of wildcat walkouts in the plants, led by black workers. And word had spread of the death of Nagi Daifullah. A Yemeni farm worker, Daifullah had been killed by a sheriff in California because of his work with the United Farm Workers organizing the many migrant Yemeni and Mexican grape pickers.

So when they called for this afternoon's rally, nearly 2,000 people showed up at the parking lot of the headquarters of UAW Local 600 on Dix Avenue, right across from the Hashmi Hall and Kamel's, to protest the purchase of the bonds and to support those fighting in the war. Poor Arab auto workers joined with more affluent professionals, and people came from the Palestinian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Lebanese-American communities, their Chaldean, Melkite, Maronite, and Orthodox churches, and their Sunni and Shiite mosques.

From the Local, they marched seventy abreast through the Southend. The numerous stores, coffee shops, and restaurants had closed in solidarity. They carried banners in English and Arabic:

NO VIETNAM IN THE MIDEAST.

STOP U.S.-ISRAELI TERROR AGAINST ARAB PEOPLE

ISRAEL WANTS ITS PEACE—

A PIECE OF JORDAN, SYRIA, LEBANON, EGYPT!

They chanted:

Break our back? No you can't! We will get our homeland back!

Nixon, Nixon, don't forget, Agnew fell and you will yet.

Keep your bomb, keep your jet. No more aid, for your pet!

Free of taxes, Israeli bonds, to purchase arms, to kill my people.

Phosphor bombs, napalm bombs, tax-free bombs, to kill my

people.

We must scream, we must thunder, No, no, Nixon, no more bombs!

They continued to the American Moslem mosque on Vernor Avenue. Religious and civil leaders addressed the crowd, speaking from the elevated steps of the mosque. They urged support for Arab efforts to regain territories taken by the Israelis. They demanded that the United States remain neutral and "not cause another Vietnam" by continuing arms support for Israel. And they called on U.S. newspapers and TV stations to report the dispute between the Arabs and Israelis objectively.

Abdeen Jabara, the lawyer who represented the South East Dearborn Community Council, urged the UAW members present to circulate petitions among fellow workers asking the union to divest its Israeli financial holdings.

When Jabara said, "Arab liberation cannot be won through manipulation but only through struggle," cries went up: "You speak the truth!"

As the leaders spoke, Alan and the guys up front decided to pass a cardboard box for contributions. People threw in what they could. Some contributed money; many Yemeni auto workers—among the poorest—signed over a whole week's paycheck, while others took their gold wedding bands off and tossed them in. By the end of the afternoon, they had raised over \$30,000.

The wind whipping up the wide Detroit River settled in Alan's bones as he picketed, shivering, in front of downtown's Cobo Hall on November 28, 1973.

With 2,000 other auto workers—Arabs, blacks, and whites—they were going to show the UAW they were serious about those Israeli bonds. Continuing to ignore them—the workers—was no longer going to be possible.

Tonight the UAW leadership would be arriving in their tuxedos, with their wives in long gowns, for a dinner sponsored by B'nai B'rith. The American Jewish organization was going to honor UAW president Leonard Woodcock with the award for "Humanitarian of the Year."

Some of the more prominent attendees included the GM chairman, a Michigan Supreme Court justice, a former Michigan governor, and the Detroit mayor. They were joining several state university presidents and a thousand other guests of Detroit's liberal establishment.

Alan was sure the dinner would be fancy, but Woodcock would have to cross a picket line of auto workers freezing their asses off to get to his hundred-dollar-a-plate dinner. And the workers were going to make sure those dining would not be able to ignore them.

Things weren't good these days for the auto industry or its workers. On October 17, three days after Alan and thousands of others rallied in front of the UAW Local 600 and the mosque on Vernor, eleven Arab oil-producing nations announced they were reducing oil production by 5 percent every month until Israel withdrew from occupied Arab territories and the rights of the Palestinian people were recognized and restored.

During the twenty days of fighting, which ended with a ceasefire on October 26, it seemed to Alan most Americans had not given the war much thought. The oil embargo, on the other hand, had forced Americans to pay more attention. While in 1967 the war had been "over there" and out of mind, Americans were now waiting in line for gas and not getting any. And a lot of them, from politicians to newspaper people to regular folk, were blaming Arabs for it.

Even before the war, the United States had already been facing an impending shortage of oil; in the last six weeks, the country as a whole was feeling the pinch.

Earlier that month, President Nixon had addressed the nation in a televised speech. He urged Congress to create an agency that would be given more funding than the Manhattan Project to develop enough domestic petroleum, nuclear, solar, and other energy resources to make the United States self-sufficient by 1980.

In the meantime, he had ordered public utilities and other companies to stop shifting from coal to oil as fuel. Commercial flights had decreased by more than 10 percent because of reduced allocations of jet fuel for aircraft. The president had called on Americans to turn their thermostats down to 68 degrees and urged managers of offices, factories, and stores to reduce energy consumption by 10 percent, by either using less heat or cutting down work hours. Additionally, he had asked governors to reduce speed limits from sixty to fifty miles per hour.

Then on Sunday, November 25, the president announced that as of January 1, 1974, rationing of home heating oil would start. He also asked gasoline stations to close on Sundays.

Because automobiles were accountable for 28 percent of the nation's petroleum consumption, the shortage was altering how much Americans were willing to spend on their love affair with cars. Car sales in October had fallen 11.4 percent. And because cars had built Detroit as much as Detroit had built cars for nearly seventy years, the Motor City was feeling the nation's pinch even more.

What had made the car companies so rich was the full-size car. Models like the Chevrolet Impala, Oldsmobile 88 or 98, and the Buick got 10.5 miles to a gallon of gasoline in city driving. European and Japanese cars got better mileage because American-made full-size sedans weighed 4,000 pounds, half a ton more than what they drove in Europe and Japan. In the last month, sales of smaller cars, which got around twenty miles per gallon, had gone up 10 percent while sales of standard-size cars had fallen 25 percent.

This was bad news for Detroit. Small cars were inherently less profitable than the big ones, because they cost about as many man-hours of work but procured a much smaller selling price.

Auto workers were feeling it. A couple of weeks before, General Motors had laid off 137,000 workers. At Ford, 150,000 workers were facing layoffs. Arab workers, often among the last ones hired, found themselves to be among the first ones laid off.

For Detroiters, it was a bad cycle—there wasn't enough gas to fill up their cars, let alone fuel the cars that many of them made for a living. And for Arab Detroiters, there were those who turned around and blamed the people in Dearborn for what they were all suffering together.

When Alan addressed groups all over Dearborn about the Southern lawsuit and explained why the neighborhood was viable given the influx of immigrant workers, he would sometimes get asked, "Why do you people want to come here if you hate America so much?"

Alan would respond, "People would love to be here. And the ones who are here love being here."

Others would ask, "Why are you guys doing this to us with the oil?" Alan would tell them, "We're not all oil sheikhs," or "I don't have a pump in my backyard, nor is there a special pump for Arab Americans," explaining that he was suffering too from the shortage.

Others didn't bother to ask anything. They just started calling the Arabs rag heads and towel heads—based on the new caricatures popping up everywhere—in addition to old-school sand scratchers, camel jockeys, and desert niggers.

But the Arab and Arab-American auto workers were not going to drop their demand that *their* union divest all its Israeli bonds; they ultimately believed in the American sense of right.

After the Local 600 demonstration in October, they realized that they needed their own workers' caucus—like blacks—to facilitate their own organizing and advocacy in the factories as well as to be able to take their issues to the other workers. After all, not only did they need their support, but as workers on the line, their interests were often the same.

They formed caucuses in all of the plants, and Alan briefed the workers on how to make their case with their colleagues. He told them not to get involved in discussions about the Arab-Israeli conflict but to focus instead on the dues workers were paying. The emphasis, he explained, had to be on the fact that their dollars were going to a foreign government to help foreign folks in their foreign countries. Their money, Alan believed and had argued, should stay in America to help *American* workers in Dearborn, in Detroit, or wherever their neighborhoods were. For example, the money could be used to build playgrounds for workers' kids, where many had none, or at the very least buy them sneakers and balls.

In addition to using the caucus to spread the word about tonight's show-down at Cobo Hall, they created leaflets in Arabic and English. They tried to run a full-page ad based on the English version in the *Detroit Free Press*. The header of the ad read: From Bombs to Bombs to Bondage. The paper ran it only as a quarter-page ad and after changing the wording. It appeared as a half-page ad in the black newspaper *The Michigan Chronicle*.

To encourage Arab auto worker turnout, the leaders of the Arab churches and mosques called for a day of mourning for the Arab victims of the October war, nearly 20,000, and asked that Arab workers be excused. Others took vacation time or called in sick. For those who hadn't heard or showed up at work that afternoon during the shift change, they were greeted by community members encouraging them to come to Cobo Hall instead. They had been there picketing in the cold since late in the afternoon.

Other Detroit Arabs who weren't auto workers were attending memorial services at the churches and mosques at the same time.

And this was un-fucking-believable. Alan thought; they shut down both lines of the afternoon shift at Dodge Main! They probably cost Chrysler hundreds of thousands of dollars of lost production. For the first time since the black workers' caucus was founded in 1968, a political action had stopped production at the largest Chrysler plant in the world.

They were able to pull it off because so many of the other workers—non-Arabs—had walked off in solidarity with them.

Alan was elated. Detroit was the Big Three (General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford), and they had just rattled their cage. It meant they had some power. The union would have to pay attention to them now, see that they had been wrong, and have to agree to change their ways.

And though it was the union's attention they were trying to get, it sure felt good to give it to the Big Three. Alan hated Ford for what they had done to Ronnie. When his brother came home from Vietnam and applied for a job at Ford—to be able to support his wife and daughter—the doctors at the Rouge told him he was a liability to the company with his hands like that. "I wasn't a liability to my country?" Ronnie had yelled back. Alan had been so angry that day that he had declared he was going to quit, until Ronnie pulled him back and told him not to give up his pay.

And though Alan was off the line now, just thinking of it, he still could feel the heat on his skin, hear the drilling and hammering as if it were in his skull, and smell the burning oil as if it lined his nostrils. For all the other guys who still had to get permission to go to the bathroom and listen to the foreman tell them to work faster, it felt pretty good to have stopped the lines.

Now Woodcock, the head of the union that was supposed to represent them, the workers—who weren't eating any hundred-dollar-a-plate dinners—was coming to one in his fancy tuxedo.

As a few dinner guests watched from the huge plate-glass windows at Cobo Hall, Alan and the others circled slowly on the pavement, carrying signs, and chanting in English, "No more bombs, no more bonds" and in Arabic, "Oh my people, fight on, fight on until we liberate Palestine."

Signs read:

DON'T ABUSE WORKERS' DUES.

BONDS MURDER BLACK BROTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

JEWISH PEOPLE YES, ZIONISM NO.

They waited for Woodcock until finally a cop came and told them that the UAW president had taken a back entrance and was already inside, enjoying his dinner. Someone ran in to see if it was true. It was, so the crowd moved on to Kennedy Square for the scheduled rally.

Afterward, a few of them headed back to Stanley's Bar on Dix in the Southend for a drink. Alan didn't think he could get warm without one.

Alan sat tensely at a makeshift negotiation table in the Hashmi Hall.

The UAW Local 600 had finally agreed to meet with them, a meeting Alan had been trying to get ever since the Israeli bonds had come to light. Only after the stunt at Cobo Hall had the union paid them any attention.

Alan realized that they hadn't been given the meeting because there was moral legitimacy to their point, but rather because they had kicked them in the teeth with the walkout. Just like with the Southend lawsuit, what was right didn't seem to matter as much as a showing of some force, whether it was by legal or labor action.

The picketing had taken Woodcock by surprise; that night, he stated that the UAW had purchased the bonds in 1966 and 1968 and promised not to buy any more. He reiterated that the union had nothing against the Arab people, and added that the UAW was in fact working with Arab-American senator James Abourezk from South Dakota to contact Egyptian union leaders.

Emil Mazey, the secretary-treasurer of the UAW, had been less kind. He had both told reporters and written in the December issue of *Solidarity*, the union's magazine, that the Arab-American Coordinating Committee was guilty of "distortions" and "outright lies." It was the U.S. Communist Party, he said, that was "agitating union members of Arab descent in an effort to alienate them from their non-Arab brothers and sisters," adding that the Soviet Union was the only country that benefited from turmoil in the Middle East. He had also said that "We believe the state of Israel has a right to live. It is the only democracy in the Middle East."

Walter Dorosh, the UAW Local head, had been directed by the national leadership to meet with the Arab organizers of the walkout. He would momentarily be coming across the street from the 600's headquarters to meet with Alan and the other representatives in the Hashmi Hall. They set up a table in front of the stage and took seats on one side. On the other were two chairs, one for Dorosh and one for his financial secretary.

Alan didn't want to have to go up against these guys; the union had been pretty good at advocating for them as workers. Alan came from a union family; they went to the union Christmas party at Solidarity House every year—the union was their home. Alan also knew that the car companies had likely busted the union's chops over the wildcat walkout. The union leadership was supposed to control their guys, and Alan and the others had just undermined them.

Dorosh arrived. He was a slightly stocky, fair-haired man who looked mean when he scowled, and Alan never saw him not scowling, even when he strutted up and down Dix, which took nerve for someone not from the Southend.

Perfunctory greetings were exchanged. Alan thanked Dorosh for the meeting.

Yeah yeah, all right. "What do you want?" Dorosh asked.

"We have a list of demands," Alan said, passing them over.

The demands included divesting of the bonds; agreeing to send no more money to any foreign country, including Israel; supporting the Arab Workers Caucus; and voting and transparency on how their dues were being spent.

Dorosh read the demands silently, then handed them to his financial secretary. They nodded at each other.

Dorosh put the list down in front of him.

"That it?" he finally asked.

Yes, that was it. Alan felt like an idiot. They hadn't asked for enough.

"All right, let me tell you something," Dorosh said, very slowly and deliberately. "Don't you ever fuck with the union again."

Dorosh made it clear they were playing with fire; these guys didn't make idle threats. Alan understood that "Don't you ever fuck with the union again" was the official UAW line, and he worried for the Arab guys working at the plants. He also worried that they had alienated someone they would rather have as an ally.

But what were they supposed to do, Alan wanted to know. The way he saw it, here was this institution that espoused the greatest sentiments of workers' rights, of liberating the oppressed, providing security for its workers, sticking its foot up their asses by taking their dues, and arming the country that was killing their people.

The more Alan thought about it, the more he decided he wanted out of street politics. They had to get a candidate on the city council. They had to break in. Helen had lost in the general elections. She had been the wrong candidate to run; she was too easily irritated and the woman was already fiery! But Alan was not ready to give up and had already decided they would try again in the next election.

Once Dorosh left, Alan finally let his breath out again.

That fall, Motown—now based in L.A. and a world away from the Motor City—released a hit record on its Tamla label by Stevie Wonder called *Higher Ground*. To a funk beat played on his synthesizer, Stevie encouraged folks to keep on trying, even though the powerful would ignore them and even work against them. As bad as things seemed, he promised, it wouldn't be forever, and one day soon they would all reach a higher ground.

OCTOBER 11, 1985



© BETTMAN/CORBIS

Silenced

When the phone rang in the middle of the night in May 1985, Norma Odch thought she was still dreaming. With the receiver dangling close to her ear, all she heard was music, a melody that sounded to her like mourning.

"It's music," she said out loud, in response to her husband's shifting beside her.

Though she could not make out the tune, when the caller finally spoke, his words were unequivocal.

"Alex is going to die," he taunted her, daring her to not believe him. "And soon you're going to be a widow."

Norma was stunned. She knew there had been calls to Alex's office, and she knew right away this had to be one of *those* calls. But this was the

first to the house, and the first she had ever answered. She never imagined they threatened actual death.

Alex took the phone from her. "Are you going to stop this or what?" he asked the caller, even then not raising his voice. "This is my family. Don't call my house anymore." Alex reached over and gently settled the phone back in its place.

Norma turned on the lights. "What is going on?" she asked him. "What if they really mean it, what if they kill you?"

"Don't worry about it," Alex responded.

Norma persisted. "What if they do it again? Why didn't you tell me they threatened to kill you? Are you going to report this to the police, to the FBI?"

"In the morning," Alex said.

Then Norma started asking about all the other incidents that had been happening in the past few years. "Did you report the egging of the car?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Alex, he said he's going to kill you."

"Nothing is going to happen," Alex tried to reassure her.

"What if they do it on our trip?" she kept on.

With summer vacation about to begin for their eldest two girls—ages seven and five—Norma and Alex were planning a trip to visit their village, Jifna, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Alex always promised the girls they would know where their parents came from—a simple place of many steeples and limestone houses, where history's ancient eras, from Biblical to Byzantine to Roman to Crusader, were written in the architecture. This trip would be their first time back since 1981, and Alex had already planned an itinerary that would take the two older girls all across the Holy Land. Norma could not wait to show her mother how much they had grown, and to introduce her baby girl. Even though she loved her home in California, in the village she could let the kids run outside and never worry about them. She could talk to her best friend, Nahla, with whom she had been exchanging letters for the ten years since she had come to America, and Alex could roam his family's fruit groves, eating right off the trees all the apricots, figs, plums, and peaches he desired.

But now, Norma chastised herself for missing the obvious; if someone

really wanted to kill Alex, they could easily do it in Jerusalem or Nablus. There, she thought, a Palestinian could be killed and no authority would investigate or prosecute the murder.

For the past few weeks, she had been consumed only with planning the baby's baptism, which Norma was determined to see done in Orange, the town of citrus trees and terra-cotta roofs that they had made home. The older girls were baptized in Jifna, but Norma had had little control over the party thrown afterward at her mother-in-law's house. In California, Norma could do it her way—she would pick the decorations, choose the food, and decide who to invite. As she lay back, letting Alex think she was reassured, she prayed their trip to their village would be a safe one.

For now, though, she took comfort in being in California. Nothing, she told herself, after all, would happen here where Alex—where all Americans—had the freedom to speak their minds.

The calls had started years before when Alex took the job as West Coast regional director of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in 1981. ADC, a Washington-based organization with chapters across the country, had been founded the year before to counter the racial stereotyping that Americans of Arab descent believed was causing discrimination against them; it was modeled on the Jewish Anti-Defamation League.

One month after Norma had received the threatening phone call, in June 1985, the hijacking of a TWA jet by Hezbollah-linked operatives set off a flood of reports to ADC of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim incidents around the United States. Pipe bombs were thrown into a Houston mosque. Islamic centers were vandalized in San Francisco, Dearborn, and near Bethesda. Centers in Denver and Quincy, Massachusetts, received bomb threats. Since its founding, threats to ADC were common, and Alex was its main representative in California.

He had become a recognizable face in the Arab-American community, intervening on behalf of any who needed assistance. He advocated for women who wanted to wear their head coverings at work, gave voice to the concerns of migrant Yemeni workers who picked grapes on farms in Lamont, invited politicians to come meet their Arab-American

constituents, organized concerts with Arab singers, and confronted car dealers who used grotesque caricatures of Arabs to move last year's model off their lots. He also built relationships with community and religious leaders from black, Hispanic, and Jewish groups and was a member of many interfaith and interracial/ethnic groups, including the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

In addition, he was often called on to share the seldom-heard Palestinian perspective on the conflict with Israel. Alex would poignantly describe their own exodus and dispossession as a way to move the region toward peace, which he believed would better the lives of both Jews and Arabs whether overseas or here in America.

The Palestinian narrative, however, was one that did not sit well with the Jewish Defense League (JDL), an extremist group inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who advocated that the Palestinians be driven from Israel to make it ethnically "pure," and disowned by many of the Jewish groups in the United States. The JDL's involvement in both threats and acts of violence had put them on the FBI's radar since the 1970s. JDL members often picketed ADC events, heckling attendees, and had even entered a mosque in LA and held a sit-in. They provocatively opened an office down the street from that of ADC—Alex's office—in Santa Ana.

The JDL's constant proximity to Alex's workplace was worrisome, though Alex never talked about the depths of their hostility. With Norma and the girls still in Jifna until the beginning of the school year in September, Alex managed to hide from her what had happened in Boston after he had returned ahead of her from the summer visit to the West Bank.

Across the country on August 17, a bomb was found in a package propped up against the door of ADC's New England office. Police bomb-squad officers removed the bomb successfully, but when they tried to detonate it in a dump in West Roxbury, it exploded in the face of one officer, causing severe burns on his face, arms, and hands; another man was injured. An anonymous caller to the *Boston Herald* claimed responsibility on behalf of the JDL, promising that such incidents would continue.

Alex suspected the threatening calls he was receiving came from the JDL as well, because he often recognized the voice of their leader, Irv Rubin. Alex initially sought to engage Rubin, as was always his habit, tell-

ing him, "Let's sit and talk and stop fighting," but he soon realized that those efforts were futile. Rubin's currency was violence, imbuing even the slogans that he coined, such as "For every Jew, a .22" and "Keep Jews alive with a .45." In 1978, Rubin had been charged with soliciting murder when he held up five \$100 bills at a news conference against a Nazi march in Skokie and offered them to anyone who maimed or killed a member of the Nazi Party. "And if they bring us the ears," he said, "we'll make it \$1,000." Daring anyone not to believe him, he added, "This is not said in jest, we are deadly serious." But after an intense legal battle lasting several years, he was acquitted, astounding even some of his supporters.

Alex believed violence as a way of solving problems was only for animals and that when human beings resorted to it, they themselves became animals. While the threats worried Alex once they became directed against Norma and the girls, he felt nonetheless that he had to continue speaking up on behalf of Arab Americans, whom he saw as easy targets of discrimination, and to try to let Americans know the Palestinian side of what had happened and was happening to their homeland.

Politics, though, had not always been Alex's passion. He had remained relatively less touched than other Palestinians by the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948. Both his parents were from Jifna, in the West Bank, and as such were not forced from their homes when Israel was created, unlike Norma's father, who, when torn from his home in Jaffa, had had time only to take the worn bed pillow from beneath his cheek. The pillow had remained sacred to her family, and it occupied a spot on her eldest sister's bed even after her father's passing, when Norma was only three years old.

Then Alex's destiny was reborn in 1967, and it would become Norma's as well when she wedded her fate to his with their marriage in 1975. In 1967, Alex had been a college student studying engineering at the University of Cairo. During the war that year, Israel roundly defeated the combined military forces of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, capturing the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. When Alex tried to go back to his village in the West Bank at the war's end, he was told by the Israeli Occupation that he had to have someone sponsor him to "visit" the land where he was born and where his ancestors had lived for centuries.

Suddenly the consequences of the founding of Israel had come to involve him personally. He was not able to return home until 1972. Years later, Alex told Norma that it had killed him inside in 1967 that he was forbidden to return home. He was hounded: why are they doing this to me?

Needing an answer to this question and trying to make sense of the pain of being denied entrance to his own country, Alex abruptly changed majors from engineering to economics while in Cairo. He then went on to pursue a master's degree in political science at California State University at Fullerton. He taught Arabic at Cal State and at Coastline Community College, where he also taught Mideast history and politics and had been recently elected to the Academic Senate.

But what Alex had loved was poetry, publishing a book of poems in 1983, *Whispers in Exile*. He wrote a few verses in his journal every night, after he recorded his daily happenings. Before sleeping, he would read the verses, written in classical Arabic, to Norma. He translated them for her into dialect or English, and she found them beautiful.

While Alex made justice and equality for Arabs and Arab Americans his life's mission, Norma focused instead on learning all the skills required to provide a loving home for her husband and their daughters. Having grown up in a boarding school, she was not as experienced as most Palestinian girls in chores and cooking. The only food she knew how to make was falafel. Alex helped so much, though, as he promised he would the day he proposed to her: "I want you to be my queen, and I will never do anything less for you than what suits a queen."

Norma hoped to God Alex would get his dream to see an independent and free Palestinian state, but she herself never believed it would happen. How could Alex, one man, stop the internal fighting among Palestinians, who drew lines in the sand between themselves over political and religious differences? How could he make Israel and America see the Palestinians as fellow human beings? Yet Alex never stopped believing, never lost faith, and Norma, who admired his idealism, was determined to support him.

But when the threats started, and the specter of danger haunted their lives, she asked Alex, whom she did not think understood the sacrifice she was making in raising a family with threatened peril hanging over

their heads, "Why, why if these things are so important, if you have such strong feelings about Palestine and politics, why would you even consider marriage?"

"Why did you marry me and have us in your life?" she would ask.

On Thursday, October 10, 1985, Alex appeared during an interview on the eleven o'clock news on KABC-TV in L.A. Alex was being asked for a reaction to the slaying that Tuesday of Leon Klinghoffer, a 69-year-old tourist from New York City who, after being held hostage aboard the ship *Achille Lauro* in the Mediterranean, had been killed in his wheelchair and then dumped overboard. The Italian cruise liner had been hijacked by Palestinian militants from the Palestinian Liberation Front, though Israel had accused the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of being linked to the hijacking.

The standoff had come to an end after two days, when through Arafat's intervention, the armed Palestinians surrendered to Egyptian authorities in exchange for a promise of safe passage to Tunisia, where the PLO said it would try the men. The hijackers, however, had initially demanded that they not be handed over to the PLO. There was speculation that the gunmen, who had held the 500 passengers and crew hostage since Monday, had disobeyed orders to carry out an operation inside Israel and hijacked the ship instead. But as an Egyptian civilian airliner was flying them to Tunisia, U.S. Navy fighter jets forced the plane to land at a NATO air base in Italy, where they were detained.

Asked to comment on the events, Alex gave KABC a lengthy interview. During the broadcast, a brief segment was shown. In mild terms, Alex denied that Arafat was responsible for the hijacking, saying, "As far as I know, Arafat did an excellent job, and we commend Arafat for his positive role in solving this issue." He characterized Arafat as a "man of peace," and expressed regret that U.S. action had kept those responsible from being taken to Tunisia for trial by PLO authorities.

When Alex came home, Norma asked him right away, "Why would you say *just* that?" She was terrified; in recent weeks the threats had escalated, and all promised the same thing: "An eye for an eye" and "If a Jew dies, an Arab dies." To Norma, Arafat was seen only as a terrorist in the

United States, and the Palestinian cause as terrorism. Any suggestion of nuance or context would be taken as an endorsement of the man or of terrorism.

"Norma, I said much much more." Alex sighed. "But you know how they cut." Alex told Norma he had condemned the killing of Klinghoffer and had condemned the hijacking as well as terrorism around the world. What he had said about Ararat was that he should not be underestimated, that he could be a man of peace, and that he would do justice to those who committed the murder and hijacking.

"They're going to hurt you over this," she told him, unconvinced that anyone would give his abbreviated words the benefit of the doubt.

The next morning, Norma and Alex shared their coffee in bed while watching *Good Morning America*. When the national network cut to local affiliates, KABC rebroadcast the truncated interview with Alex from the night before.

Alex yelled out, smiling, "Girls, come see Daddy on TV!"

Norma leaned over and whispered in his ear, "They're going to kill Daddy for this."

Alex said nothing.

Since the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, the threatening calls had increased, both to Alex's office and even to their home. Alex again recognized the voice as belonging to JDL head Irv Rubin. Norma and Alex dutifully reported the calls to the Santa Ana Police Department; the police told them each time that there was nothing they could do unless something actually happened.

Whenever Norma tried to scare him straight, as she had just done, Alex would calmly respond, "It will be an honor to die for Palestine." Norma knew he felt the same way about dying for the United States, but she was intent on his staying alive.

"Just think of me and the girls," she would tell him. "I grew up without a father, I don't want our girls to grow up without one too." Norma's father had died when she was three years old. As he lay in the casket, he had a cigarette tucked between his fingers, a last fix her mother had given him to make the journey to the afterlife easier. He had looked like he was sleeping.

"Who will take care of us if anything were to happen to you?" she would ask him.

Alex would respond in the same soft-spoken voice he used in any situation, no matter how tense. "God will."

While he played with the baby, Norma pulled the older girls' long black hair back into ponytails. She put her robe over her nightgown and drove the girls around the corner to school. As she dropped them off, she kissed them both and told them to have fun.

As she drove home, Norma suddenly felt like making Alex a proper sit-down breakfast, something she hardly ever did on the weekdays, when Alex would just drink some OJ on the run. She made him all his favorite foods, scrambling eggs, frying hahn, making hummus, and mixing olive oil with *za'atar*—a spice mixture of thyme and sesame seeds—that she had brought with her from Palestine. She brewed tea and made it Arabic style, sweetening it with a generous amount of sugar and steeping it with fresh mint leaves that she cut from her garden.

"Wow," Alex told her when he joined her in the kitchen, after he had showered and dressed. "You went out of your way!"

As the bowls and plates began to empty and with the baby in her high chair, entertained by the TV, Alex and Norma shared as private a morning as they could, stealing time at a moment usually spent rushing. When the last morsel disappeared, Norma rose smiling and went about returning the kitchen to order.

Alex had lingered as long as he could. He had to make it to work by nine. His assistant, who usually arrived first, had a doctor's appointment, and so it fell to Alex to open the office today. Alex bent to kiss the baby, and as Norma stood at the sink washing the dishes, Alex came up behind her and kissed her on the cheek.

"I love you very much," he told her in her ear. "You know that, don't you?" he said, before turning to leave.

"I love you too," she answered. And then she added, "Be careful!" They looked at each other, both surprised at the words she had never uttered before.

Norma had been so innocent when they met. She had been raised in the wholly sheltered and asexual world of the Evangelical Home for Girls; her father's death when she was three had forced her mother, a registered

nurse, to return to work. With no one to help raise her four children, Norma's mother had no choice but to send her children to a boarding school for orphans in a village twenty kilometers away. Paying to board them at the Evangelical Home for Girls was still cheaper than having them in the house. During the days, Norma's mother tended instead to the refugees and their children in the Kalandia, Deir Ammar, and Jalazone camps, as a head nurse for UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Until she was fifteen, Norma had fallen asleep crying every night because she wanted more than anything to be with her mother. She wanted to lie beside her and drift into slumber as her mother stroked her hair; she had always begged not to be sent back to the school during her once-a-month trip home or at the end of her month-long summer vacation.

But by August 1975, weeks after her seventeenth birthday, she did not want to go home at all. On her floor at the boarding house of the school, she enjoyed being by herself, doing what she wanted, with no pressures, no authority, and no one telling her what to do. However, whether or not she went home for the compulsory break was hardly up to Norma, and so she found herself back in Jifna for what remained of the summer vacation.

When she arrived in front of her family's simple one-room stone house to find the door locked, she ran next door to the much bigger home where her mother was visiting their neighbors, the Odeh family, whose eldest son was home for a brief visit from the States, where he was studying. As her mother handed her the keys, she admonished Norma for turning to run off so quickly. "Why don't you come in and greet the people here?"

Having essentially grown up under the care of the American and Scottish sisters and in isolation from Palestinian society, Norma had little idea of Arab social protocol and graces, which required respect and deference on the part of the young toward the old, and warmth and hospitality toward all.

At the prompting of her mother, who rarely had a chance to exercise a parental role, Norma made the rounds of the people assembled, shaking hands, and leaning in first toward the right, touching cheeks and making a kissing sound, and then repeating the same on the left, a perfunctory ritual kiss, placed nowhere but in the air.

When she stopped in front of Alex Odeh, a balding thirty-one-year-old with sleepy eyes and a mole beside his lengthy nose, she hardly noticed him. She had no idea that Alex would never forget the green dress she wore that day and the way it made her chameleon eyes seem so green against her black, feathered hair.

She had no idea that when he bent to shake her hand and kiss her that he had already decided he would marry her. Norma also had no idea what Alex's father meant when he said, "I'm afraid that kiss is going to stick."

After finishing the dishes, Norma got dressed to go visit Therese, a Jordanian woman married to a Palestinian whom Norma had befriended in California.

As had been their habit ever since the phone threats had begun, she phoned Alex to tell him she was leaving the house even though Therese lived only a mile away. The number to his office was busy, and she paused for a moment, but decided not to wait; she would call him when she arrived at Therese's house.

She loaded the baby into the Oldsmobile and picked up one of her other daughters from kindergarten at 11:30, then headed to Therese's for a late morning of coffee and conversation.

When Norma pulled into Therese's driveway, she saw Therese's mother-in-law, whom they all called *Um Habib* (mother of Habib) perched on the edge of the low fence in the front yard. Norma could tell she was crying.

"What's wrong?" Norma asked her as she got out of her car.

"Nothing," she said.

"Did anything happen?" Norma asked her.

"You didn't hear the news?" Um Habib responded, beginning to cry even more.

"If you know something, you need to tell me," Norma insisted.

"There was a bomb in Santa Ana," she said.

Therese then came out of the house. "What's going on?" Norma asked her.

"An office was bombed in Santa Ana," Therese told her. "It might be your husband's office."

"It can't be," Norma said. Then, "Was anyone hurt?"

"Give me the girls," Therese said. "I'll watch them and you can go."

Norma left the girls with Therese. Running to her car, she hoped to God nothing had happened to Alex. She crossed red lights, not caring if the police tried to stop her. Once in downtown Santa Ana, she turned onto the street where Alex's office was located, only to find the police blocking her way; they would not let her go any farther. Norma got out of her car, and even from a block away, she could see shattered glass on the ground everywhere. There was no sign of Alex.

"Please," she told the policeman, "I need to know if anyone got hurt."

"We have no news at this time," he told her.

"Please, I need to know," she pleaded.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I think it's the office my husband worked in that was bombed. His name is Alex Odeh, and I am his wife," she responded. Norma thought she saw recognition flicker across the policeman's face. She started shaking; Norma didn't think anything like this would happen in America. She began to collapse, falling forward, but the policeman caught her and put her in her car.

From afar, a man named Ahmad recognized Norma. He had a scheduled appointment with Alex that morning, and when he saw Norma he approached the policeman and explained who he was.

"Go with her to Western Medical Center," he told Ahmad. "That's where they took Alex."

As Norma drove, following behind Ahmad, she prayed to God that Alex was not seriously hurt; if he's hurt, she thought, he'll get over it. He'll heal. But please don't let anything happen to him, please God, she pleaded. I don't want my daughters to grow up without a father like I did.

When they arrived at the hospital, she saw Sami, Alex's brother, leaving. Sami's head was down; he looked like he was in shock. Norma could tell from his look that Alex was badly hurt.

"What's going on?" Norma asked him.

"They put a bomb in Alex's office," Sami said.

Norma began to imagine what his injuries must be when Sami told her, "They killed Alex, Norma."

Norma began repeating, "No, no, no."

She was escorted into a room with Sami. People she did not recognize were there as well.

Norma asked to see Alex, that there had to be a mistake, that he was not dead.

"Face it, Norma, he's dead," said a woman Norma would later learn was a social worker.

"No, no, he can't be dead," Norma insisted.

"Yes, he is," the social worker volleyed.

"No, he might be sleeping," Norma retorted, wanting to smack her.

"I want to see him," she declared. "Nobody knows him like me, he's my husband," Norma explained, trying to remain calm. "Maybe it's not him, maybe he's sleeping, he might be someone else," she said, offering all the alternatives she could muster.

"Fine," the social worker pronounced to the others. "She won't believe it if she doesn't see him."

Norma, Sami, and the social worker rode in silence in the elevator down to the morgue. There they were met by an orderly who guided them to a stretcher that cradled a black bag cocooned around what looked like a human figure. The orderly pulled on the zipper, revealing only a face, neck, and the top of a chest; he would not let the zipper travel farther.

Inside the body bag, the face was burned and covered by what looked like purple blotches.

Norma stared at Alex. "No," she declared, "he's sleeping. That's how he sleeps." She looked at his mouth, open, his lips parted like when he would lie beside her every night. "Wake him up," she said.

No one moved.

The waiting bomb that had ripped through Alex's office at 9 a.m. was set off by a trip wire attached to the door. The blast had also ripped through the lower part of Alex's body, and the chemicals he inhaled had incinerated his lungs from the inside. The explosion was so strong that seven other people in adjoining offices and on the street were also injured. And when the first person to reach Alex had knelt beside him, Alex had whispered, "Tell my wife I love her and the girls." He had died in surgery later that morning, around 11:30.

Norma fainted. She awoke hours later in Sami's house.

In the days leading up to Alex's funeral, Norma received a continuous stream of mourners wanting to share their condolences at her brother-in-law's house. There were other Arab Americans, regular Americans, anyone who had heard of the murder—people just kept coming and coming. She received them all in total disbelief.

Norma barely talked to anyone, and though she couldn't stop crying, she constantly wondered if what was happening was real or just a hallucination.

Since fainting and waking up in Sami's home, she had gone to her house only to choose clothing to dress Alex in for his burial. She had closed their bedroom door behind her, taking his framed picture from her bedside, holding it to her chest, and asking it, "What's going to happen to us?"

Finally she approached the closet, where Alex's own fingers had traveled often, gliding over all the shirts, ties, and suits that he had been so fond of and had so carefully collected. She retrieved the brand-new suit that Alex had bought to wear to an upcoming ADC *hafla* (party/soiree) in November. She gave it to Sami to take to the mortician.

Norma spent the nights at Sami's house in a room with her daughters, who would plead with her as they all lay in bed together, not to cry anymore, Mommy. She asked them if they understood what happened.

"Daddy went to heaven," they responded. "We're not going to see him anymore."

During those nights, Norma would not let herself sleep; she was afraid whoever had killed Alex would come for her and the girls. Yet every time she began to close her eyes, she would see Alex and be sure he was knocking at the door.

Immediately after Alex's murder, news of his killing was inescapable. Local and national TV news constantly showed images of his disemboweled office. Blown-out windows revealed interior office contents to the external world with curtains, still tethered to the wall inside, floating toward the sky, while the beige coils of Alex's phone cord reached down toward the ground. Frequently repeated were the comments of Rubin, head of the JDL—the group that Arab-American leaders already were

publicly accusing of being behind the attack—who said, "I have no tears for Mr. Odeh. He got exactly what he deserved."

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith immediately denounced Alex's murder, calling it "domestic terrorism which cannot be tolerated." Regional presidents of the American Jewish Congress of Northern and Southern California issued a joint statement saying "no political disagreement justifies attacks on those engaged in peaceful and lawful pursuits." An editorial in the *New York Times* accused the JDL of being a "promoter of blatant racism in America and Israel."

But the investigations of the Santa Ana police, the FBI, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the L.A. police antiterrorist division still had yielded no suspects.

ADC's deputy executive director in Washington chastised American newspapers for running short wire-service accounts of Alex's murder while rightly devoting pages to stories on the life and death of Klinghoffer. She told the *Washington Post*, "This was an American killed on American soil by American terrorists." News accounts told every detail of Klinghoffer's life—he was a retiree, he lived in Greenwich Village, he had high blood pressure, it was his thirty-sixth wedding anniversary. Alex or ADC was identified as everything from an Arab group and its leader to a PLO front to a bomb victim.

At the less-than-gentle urging of the Arab-American community the White House finally issued a statement saying, "The administration deeply deplores this tragic event and condemns in the strongest possible terms the criminal use of violence and terrorism to achieve political ends. To even think for a moment that there exists a justification for such heinous acts does grave injustice to the principles of political freedom upon which this country was founded."

But then, even before the Tuesday funeral, local news had shifted to the Santa Ana winds, the dry warm currents that blow through Southern California every autumn. To Norma, the focus on the weather was as if to say Alex's life meant nothing.

At the viewing, Norma studied the navy suit she had selected for Alex to wear. It matched beautifully the indigo shirt of pure silk and the striped tie of alternating blues that Alex had paired with it in advance of November's big party. He also was wearing the new black Bally shoes

he had purchased for the event; he had never worn any of these clothes before.

Norma had always loved how Alex dressed. But she did not recognize Alex in the figure over which she was saying the rosary. With wax and makeup, the morticians had tried to fix the damage to Alex's face and to fill the cavity the bomb had left in his midsection, but to Norma it was all plastic. She told them to close and seal the casket.

The day of the funeral, Sami rented a limousine to drive the family from his house to St. Norbert's Catholic Church and then later to the cemetery. Norma's house, a multifamily bungalow, was just across the street from their church, but she would not turn her face to look at it as they drove on that clear morning through the neighborhood that had been her home for years and through whose streets she had strolled hand-in-hand with Alex. He had brought her here, to California, to a place with weather he loved where he could speak his mind and not be afraid.

Hundreds of cars were already pouring into the church parking lot, and Norma was surprised to see that the police had set up checkpoints to monitor who was coming and going. When the driver got out of the limousine, Norma noticed that under his jacket a gun was holstered to his side and handcuffs were clipped to his belt.

She asked Sami what was going on. Only then did she learn that the church had received threats that a bomb would go off during the funeral. The church decided to close the adjoining school for the day, and FBI agents walked the roof of the sandstone-colored church.

Though the bomb threat deterred many from coming, thousands had nonetheless gathered, and those who could not fit inside St. Norbert's spilled out onto the pavement surrounding the church. Though the doors were closed, speakers allowed those outside to hear the service.

As a precaution should a bomb explode, Norma, her daughters, and her in-laws were led into the crying room, a designated area where parents ordinarily took fussy children so that they could still hear mass without disturbing the service. The crying room was partitioned from the church by glass, a rectangular bubble adjacent to the altar, in front of which Alex's coffin had been placed. Two flags shrouded his casket, that of Palestine—the birthplace he never forgot—and that of the United States—the place he had made home.

Norma looked in amazement at how many had gathered. Then she saw several rabbis in the pews closest to the altar and became angry. How dare you kill him and then come to his funeral, how dare you add insult to my injury, she thought, before she forced herself to acknowledge that they, too, were Alex's friends. Yet Norma could not believe that all this was happening for Alex, how could he really be gone?

Outside, mourners mingled to the sound of eulogies and prayers, and at one point to that of a melancholic *ney*, the Arabic flute, weeping from inside the church. Some wore around their necks *keffiyahs* that would hours later flutter in the sky, sharing the breezes with Palestinian flags as cars filled with people made their way to Alex's final rest during the funeral procession, a journey that took them through winding roads and rising hills, to a place that looked so much like Palestine.

Even during the church service, reporters swam through the crowds in front of the church. Asked as to the significance of Alex's death, a rabbi responded with the question, "Who will I speak to now?"

Whenever Norma asked Alex why, if he was going to live a life of politics—one that might jeopardize his very life—why would he then choose to marry her, he always had a simple answer. "It was my destiny to marry you."

Norma wept in the crying room, where she could still hear the service but disturb no one.

Two weeks after the funeral, FBI agents came to visit Norma at Sami's house, where she was still staying. They told her everyone was a suspect, even her. Then they asked a series of questions.

What did she know of Alex's activities?

Did Alex keep cassette tapes of his meetings?

What could she tell them about Arab Americans in Southern California?

Did she know about "any other" activities?

And what might she know about drug smuggling?

Norma asked them, "Where do you come up with these things?" So they could see for themselves what Alex's activities were, she then gave the FBI the leather journal in which Alex wrote his poetry and daily

happenings each night. His name was engraved in gold and in Arabic on the front: *Iskander Michel Odeh*.

The FBI told her they were sorry for her loss.

Norma thought, what's the use of you feeling sorry? We kept telling you and you kept doing nothing, and now Alex is dead.

Later, an agent who had been through Alex's things at the crime site brought her a piece of traditional Palestinian cross-stitching that had hung in the office before the explosion. He told Norma, "I'm sure this was valuable for Alex, you should have it." The little tapestry had been made for Alex by Norma's mother.

In early November, an FBI official mentioned to a *New York Times* reporter that the FBI suspected the JDL was involved in the bombing. The *Times* reporter called Rubin for a comment, Rubin then called other news organizations to protest the FBI's claim. The FBI was forced the next day to publicly clarify that though they had established a possible link between the JDL and Alex's death, they were not close to an arrest. Two other bombs, aimed at former Nazi Party members, had exploded in August and September, one in New Jersey and the other in New York; the FBI believed the JDL was responsible. The bomb used to kill Alex was similarly constructed, and the way the bombs were rigged indicated explosive experts were involved.

The JDL members who would later be named as suspects moved to Israel soon after the killing. The suspects, all American-born Americans, did not, however, settle within Israel's internationally recognized borders, instead choosing to live in the state-subsidized settlements built on stolen Palestinian land in the West Bank, not far from Alex and Norma's home town of Jifna. One of them had a 1973 conviction for a bomb attack against a Palestinian in California, and another had a conviction in Israel for shooting at passing Palestinians on the West Bank.

Analysis and coverage of the murder in the press immediately linked the killing to Alex's interview the night before, opining that he died because of what he had said. But it was not Alex's habit to open the office, a task that usually fell to his assistant, Hind Bakji, a woman who had emigrated from Syria in 1976. To many, it appeared that the Arab-American community had been the real intended target and intimidation the aim.

Lending credence to such beliefs was the rash of bomb threats, in the

aftermath of Alex's death, against the Arab Community Center in L.A. and the Islamic Center of Southern California. Then on Friday, November 29, a deliberately set fire heavily damaged ADC's national headquarters in Washington, D.C., gutting its offices and destroying the food market in the same building on Connecticut Avenue. The flames burned out of control for over forty-five minutes and brought eighty firefighters to the scene.

In response to what appeared to be a pattern of hate crimes aimed at the community as a whole, that following Thursday, December 5, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it had ordered the FBI to investigate all the attacks against Arab Americans under the Civil Rights Act. And though Ronald Reagan did not visit with Norma and did not hug Norma while Nancy Reagan kissed her, as the president and first lady had done with Klinghoffer's widow, his spokesman did say the president "extended his sincere condolences" to Alex's family.

With Christmas approaching, Norma was sinking further into mourning. She and the girls had finally returned to their home to live, but she couldn't bring herself to buy a tree. Alex's sister then brought her a large pine, and since Norma could not bear to see it all the time, she took it to the girls' room instead. She did not weave any lights through its boughs, or hang glass balls from its branches, or offer any gifts by its trunk.

Two days before Christmas, a man knocked on her door. He was a Palestinian man whom Norma had known as Alex's friend. With him he had brought bags of gifts—almost a hundred different things for the girls. He explained that several of his friends, all Palestinian men, had pooled their money together to buy the toys, books, and clothes.

"I just want you to know we're always here for you," the man told Norma. "And we wish you Merry Christmas." Norma had to pause; the man was Muslim, and in fact all those who contributed the money for the presents were Muslim.

On Christmas Eve, Norma stood outside Sami's house and wept. When she went home that night, she still refused to sleep in the bed that had been hers and Alex's. Since returning home, she had slept on the couch in the living room, though sometimes she slept with the girls in their bedroom. Regardless, she always left the living room lights on through the night, to scare off anyone thinking about bombing her home.

Six months later, with no arrests or indictments in the case, Norma's mother came from Jifna to stay with her widowed daughter. Norma had prepared the bed in the room she had not entered since fetching Alex's final suit; her mother would sleep there. When it came time to kiss each other goodnight, Norma began to approach her daughters' bedroom door.

"No," her mother told her, "come into this one." She pushed open the door to Norma and Alex's room and went in.

Norma hesitated outside the door.

"Come," her mother said. "I'll sleep with you."

That night Norma lay beside her mother, and for the first time since Alex's murder, she slept through the night. The next morning, her mother dressed the girls, pulling their black hair back into long ponytails, and walked them to school while Norma slept in.

Within a year of Alex Odeh's murder, the FBI indicated that four suspects—all of whom had dual Israeli/American citizenship and were IDL members—had fled the United States and were living in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba.

ADC continued to organize on the grassroots level, but Arab Americans came away from 1985 believing that not only would they have to suffer ignorant stereotypes in popular culture and a hostile foreign policy, but also that if they tried to participate in American politics, they would risk death. Many of the post-1965 immigrants, still feeling insecure in their relatively new citizenship, came to believe that there were conditions and limitations on that citizenship; they could dream of financial wealth and success but should not fathom having impact on foreign policy in the Middle East nor influence on how Arabs or Arab Americans were represented in pop and media culture. Many learned this lesson and responded with simmering silence.

While the acts of the IDL extremists had been perpetrated by private individuals, several state actions bolstered these beliefs.

In November 1986, the Alien Border Control Committee at the Department of Justice circulated a document entitled "Alien Terrorists and Undesirables: A Contingency Plan." The plan proposed building a detention camp in a remote area of Louisiana to hold such "undesirables" until they could be expelled. The mayor of Oakdale, George Mouwad, told ABC's Nightline that it would be "good for business." His ancestors had come to the United States from Lebanon.

Then, in the dawn hours of January 26, 1987, in Los Angeles, FBI and INS agents arrested seven Palestinians and one Kenyan for pass-

ing out pamphlets and fund-raising on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a secular and socialist organization that formed the second-largest faction in the PLO after Arafat's Fatah. The group came to be known as the LA-8. After a ten-month investigation turned up no evidence of illegal actions, the FBI turned the case over to the INS, which initiated deportation proceedings. The INS dusted off the McCarran-Wahler Act, which made it a deportable offense to distribute literature advocating communist principles. (The last of the cases would not be completely over until October 2007. None of the individuals were deported.)

For those Arab Americans who had emigrated from totalitarian regimes where dissent was not tolerated and people were disappeared or imprisoned without cause, the act was a clear sign that they should keep out of politics.

In another indication to both Arabs and Arab Americans that U.S. policy in the Middle East was operating on many levels, President Reagan acknowledged to the American people that his overtures to Iran to free hostages being held by Shiite groups in Lebanon had "deteriorated" into an arms-for-hostages deal, whereby proceeds from secret U.S. arms sales to Iran were used illegally to fund Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The United States, however, continued to support Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein, in the ongoing war with Iran.

One victory was to be had. That May, the Supreme Court held in the case of Saint Francis College v. Al-Khazraji that Arabs could await themselves of the protections of §1981, federal legislation which protects people from discrimination on racial grounds.

In 1986 and 1987, 29,588 Arabs immigrated to the United States. The largest number proportionally (5,879) came from Lebanon, given the continued war; nearly 6,000 each came from Egypt and Jordan, the latter including those who came from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

DECEMBER 8, 1987

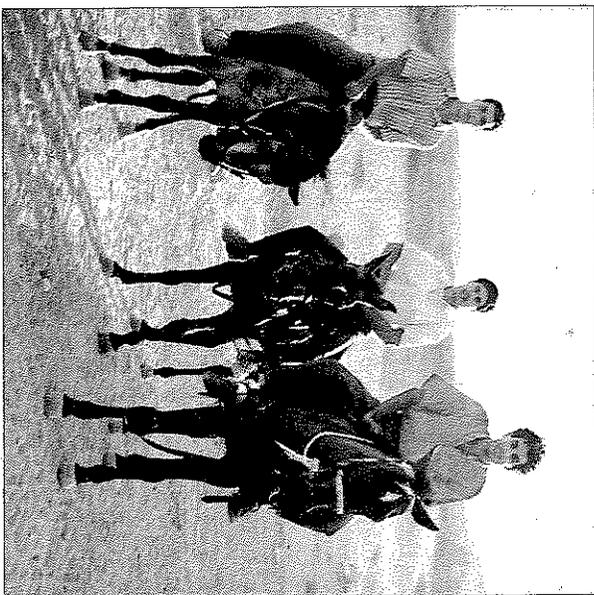


PHOTO COURTESY PRIVATE COLLECTION OF OMAR DAJANI

Bound

In March 1987, Omar Dajani and some friends at Presidential Classroom thought it would be a great idea to seal their weeklong friendship by smoking marijuana together in one of their rooms at the Omni Hotel in Washington, D.C.

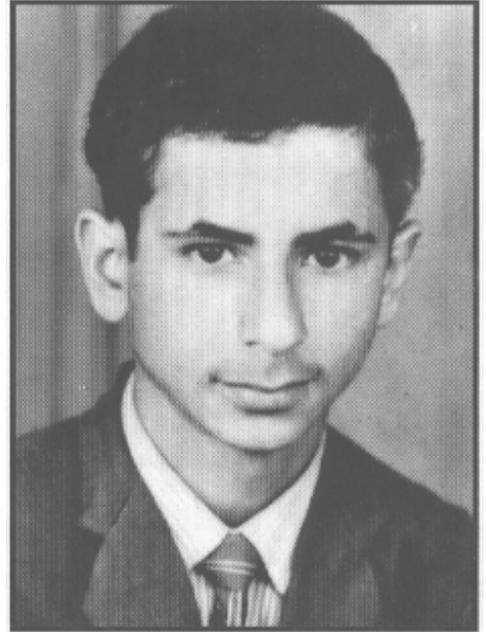
The whole week had been incredible. Omar had been selected by his high school in Tyler, Texas, to participate in Presidential Classroom, a program that brought high school students from across the United States to the nation's capital for an up-close civics education. Over the week, Omar had met members of Congress and lobbyists and had heard presentations at think tanks and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Even better, he had gotten to know other high school seniors from all around the country who were going to be attending top colleges like Princeton, NYU,

UFW MARTYR
NAGI DAIFALLAH
1949 - 1973

On the morning of August 15, 1973, Nagi Daifallah, a young Arab member of the UFW died from injuries inflicted by Deputy Sheriff Gilbert Cooper of the Kern County Sheriff's Department.

Nagi had come to this country from his native Yemen looking for a better life. Yemenese Farm Workers were the latest group of people to come to California to be exploited by the California growers.

Most of them, like Nagi, were young men in their early twenties, they were unusually shy, of slight frame, Moslem, spoke no English, and live in barren labor camps. Like other workers, they were paid only when they worked and lived wretched lives. Yet they came by the thousands because Yemen was and is one of the poorest countries of the world where the average annual income was \$94. Before the UFWs' organizing efforts, there were no alternatives for these workers.



Nagi was 24 years old when he was killed. He was 5 feet tall and weighed 100 lbs. Unlike many of his fellow workers, he had learned English and could communicate well. Many times he had served as an interpreter for UFW organizers, he was always very active in union activities, he was a good UFW member, and, in fact, was known as a leader of the Arab workers.

As a striker from El Rancho Farms near Arvin, he was one of a handful of Arab brothers who were on the picket lines in the Lamont area for many weeks of the strike.

At approximately 1:15 a.m. on August 15, a group of about 15 UFW members were present at the Smokehouse Café in Lamont, California. A Kern County Sheriff's Department vehicle arrived. One of the 3 officers in the car, Deputy Gilbert Cooper, began harassing Frank Quintana, a UFW member and picket captain.

Deputy Cooper attempted to arrest Quintana, who had been peacefully standing outside the café, for disturbing the peace. Such an arrest was in keeping with the continued campaign of harassment and arrests of UFW picket captains by the Sheriff's Department during the grape strike of 1973.

The Farm Workers who were with Quintana protested the arrest. In the midst of this confrontation, Deputy Sheriff Cooper, inexplicably, singled out Nagi and started harassing him. Nagi tried to get away and Cooper began chasing him as he ran north on the sidewalk.

The Deputy caught up behind Nagi and, without any warning to halt, swung a long, 5-cell, metal flashlight and struck Nagi in the back of the head. Cooper, 6 feet tall and more than 200 pounds, delivered such a forceful blow to the 5 foot, 100 pound Nagi that he severed Nagi's spinal cord from the base of his skull. Nagi fell to

his knees from the viciousness of the blow and then crumpled face forward to the sidewalk, unconscious and bleeding profusely from his head.

Two Sheriff's Deputies then turned Nagi on his back, seized him by the wrists and dragged him, head dangling and bouncing on the pavement, for sixty feet, leaving a massive trail of blood all the way. They left his body lying in the gutter near the rear door of the police car.

Other people, who had been told to leave by the police, attempted to come to Nagi's aid and asked the officers why they did not call an ambulance. More deputies arrived in response to the people's attempts to reach Nagi and request an ambulance. Three workers were arrested in their attempt to help their fallen brother.

At Nagi's funeral thousands of UFW workers and supporters followed the casket bearing Nagi's body on the 4-mile trek to the Forty Acres in Delano. After the service, a long car caravan accompanied the casket to the Bakersfield airport and Nagi's body was flown to Yemen for burial in his homeland. Mushin Daifallah, Nagi's father told us that Nagi was a dutiful son who sent him money as often as he could to support the family in Yemen. He said "I lost my son when I needed him the most."

STATEMENT BY CESAR E. CHAVEZ

Nagi Daifallah was an immigrant. Like so many thousands of Farm Workers, he came to this country seeking opportunity and fell into the trap of poverty and powerlessness that has enslaved so many migrant Farm Workers in our country.

He joined the United Farm Workers Union and gave himself fully to the grape strike and the struggle of justice for all Farm Workers.

Nagi Daifallah is dead at the age of 24. The hand that struck Brother Nagi down trembles in fear. It too is the victim of the climate of the violence, racism, and hatred created by those men who own everything...and kill what they cannot own.

We are faced with discrimination, exploitation, and even slaughter. The government represses our people and millions of Farm Workers are trapped in poverty while the growers lavish in riches we have earned for them.

These are differing ills, but they are the common works of greedy men. They reflect the imperfection of our society.

In the struggle to change these evils, Nagi gave his life.