

JSC Common Reading Initiative

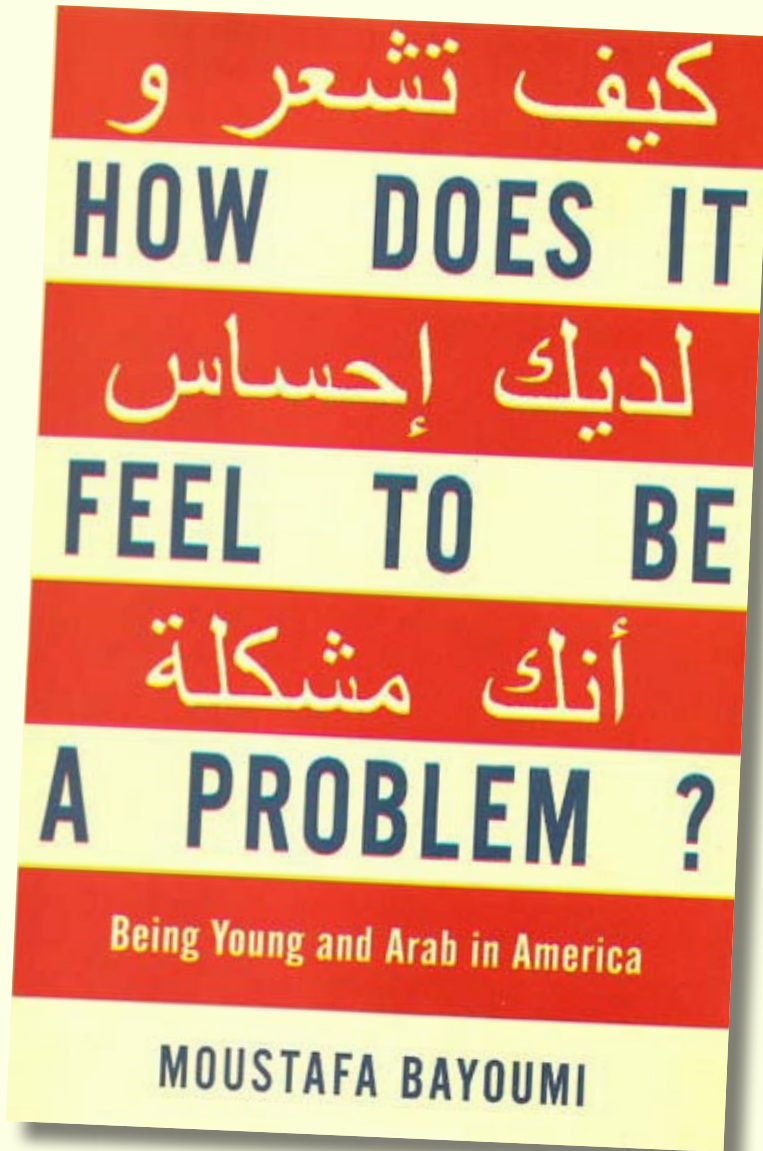


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Dear Johnson State College Students:

Welcome to the JSC community! Your decision to attend Johnson State College is the first step in exploring a world of new ideas and experiences. That exploration begins today when you open *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?* by Moustafa Bayoumi.

As a new student, you will be part of the College's Common Reading Initiative, a program of lectures, discussions, exhibitions, and concerts that surround and extend the book. The highlights of the semester will be the October 20th on-campus visit by the book's author and a separate visit by two of the individuals whose stories make up Bayoumi's book.

We've designed the program as a way to introduce the teaching and learning that goes on at Johnson State College. A committee of faculty, staff, and students met this winter to choose a book for the entire incoming class to read during the summer. This fall, you will have many opportunities to share and compare ideas about the common book. Your Peer Orientation Leaders, as well as many faculty, staff, and returning students will also have read *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?*, providing something in common for new students (especially) and other members of the JSC community.

Please take a look at the background material presented in this brochure, and keep in mind the questions raised as you read *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?* We look forward to continuing the discussion in person in August!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara E. Murphy". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name of the President.

President

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND BOOK



Moustafa Bayoumi was born in Zurich, Switzerland, and raised in Canada. He earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University and is an associate professor of English at Brooklyn College, the City University of New York. He is co-editor of *The Edward Said Reader*, and his essays have appeared in *The Best Music Writing 2006*, *The Nation*, *The London Review of Books*, *The Village Voice*, and other publications. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Since the events of 9/11, Arabs and Muslim Americans have become a very visible minority. In a revealing portrait of this community, one that lives next door and yet a world away, Moustafa Bayoumi introduces us to the individual lives of seven twenty-something men and women living in Brooklyn. Through telling real stories about young people, Bayoumi jettisons the stereotypes and clichés that constantly surround Arabs and Muslims and allows us instead to enter their worlds and experience their lives. Each of the individuals in the book struggles in their own way with the same challenge, reconciling their lives in the US with their Arab and Muslim backgrounds in a post-9/11 world.

In How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?, you will meet...

Rasha

Rasha and her family disappear after they are rounded up in the middle of the night without explanation, as part of the government's reaction to 9/11. The family becomes separated and are detained at different facilities for three months, they are released as abruptly as they were taken. As the family finds their footing again, Rasha tries to put the experience behind her and relishes her freedom in ways she never could have before her ordeal.

Sami

Sami has struggled his whole life with the question "is blood thicker than water?" Having grown up in the US, the son of Christian Arab parents, Sami feels like he doesn't relate to his Arab-American peers. After serving two tours in Iraq, Sami enrolls in college where he begins to come to grips with his questions of identity and place.

Yasmin

Yasmin, a practicing Muslim, was elected to her school's student council, but was forced to resign because the school didn't make accommodations for her faith. With the support of her family, Yasmin dedicates all of her free time to overturning the decision and proves that we can make room for everyone's culture and beliefs.

Akram

Akram was raised in his father's corner store in Brooklyn, but after high school, a life-altering summer in Palestine makes returning to his father's store in the US difficult. A chance meeting with a customer eventually sends him on a quest to get to Dubai, to find what Akram calls the new 'American' dream for young Arab-Americans.

Lina

The daughter of conservative Iraqi parents, Lina struggles to find a way to honor her Arab identity and also be a mainstream American teen. In reaction to her behavior, her parents send her to live with relatives in Iraq. Shortly after returning to the US her mother dies unexpectedly and Lina's life begins to crash around her. After suffering many disappointments, Lina starts a family of her own, but mourns the loss of the Iraq she had hoped to return to.

Omar

Omar's greatest accomplishment as an intern at Al Jazeera quickly turns to a liability as it brings to light misperceptions of Muslims and Arabs. Questions of prejudice and bias face him as he tries to find his way as an Arab American seeking a position in US news media.

Rami

Growing up in the US Rami was typical teenager, hanging out with friends, playing high school football, and dreaming of one day becoming a doctor. Everything changes when his father gets caught in an undercover sting operation that lands him in jail. Rami finds comfort in the Quran and slowly immerses himself in Islam. Unsure of his future but sure of his faith, Rami abandons his earlier dreams and dedicates himself to helping Muslims find their way in the world today.

Fall 2009 Common Reading Initiative Events

The Narcicyst – Iraqi Hip Hop

Monday August 24th Dibden Center for the Arts 8 p.m.



The Narcicyst is an Iraqi MC born in the United Arab Emirates and raised in Canada. His musical career was spawned through the collaborative work of the Euphrates family; a growing collective of Muslim visual artists, musicians, painters, filmmakers and photographers. A graduate in Political Science and Communication Studies, Narcy went on to get a masters degree in Media Studies focusing on the identity politics in Hip-Hop

poetics. He has just released his third solo album. www.narcy.net

Maz Jobrani – Comedian

Wednesday September 9th Dibden Center for the Arts 8 p.m.

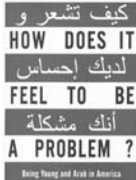


Maz Jobrani is an Iranian-born American comedian. He is part of the “Axis of Evil” comedy group and has also appeared in numerous films, television shows, on radio and in comedy clubs. Jobrani did not take the conventional route to performing comedy. He studied Political Science and Italian at UC Berkeley, where he received a B.A. degree. In fact, Jobrani was enrolled in a Ph.D. program at

UCLA when he decided to pursue his childhood dream of acting and performing comedy. He has since made appearances on shows like *The Colbert Report*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*, *Talkshow with Spike Feresten* and regularly performs at top comedy clubs. www.mazjobrani.com

Moustafa Bayoumi

Tuesday October 20th Dibden Center for the Arts 7p.m.



Moustafa Bayoumi, author of *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?*, will be on campus Tuesday October 20th. In addition to his public talk and book signing, Mr. Bayoumi will be visiting classes and meeting informally with members of the JSC Community.

www.moustafabayoumi.com/

NY Masjid: The Mosques of New York City Photographs by Edward Grazda

Dibden Center for the Arts Wings Gallery August 24 - December 18 2009

Artist Talk October 14th



Since the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, Edward Grazda has photographed many of the mosques in New York City. These photographs defy the media stereotypes of Muslims in America. These Mosques reflect and create identities for Muslims within the dense and diverse urban fabric of New York City.

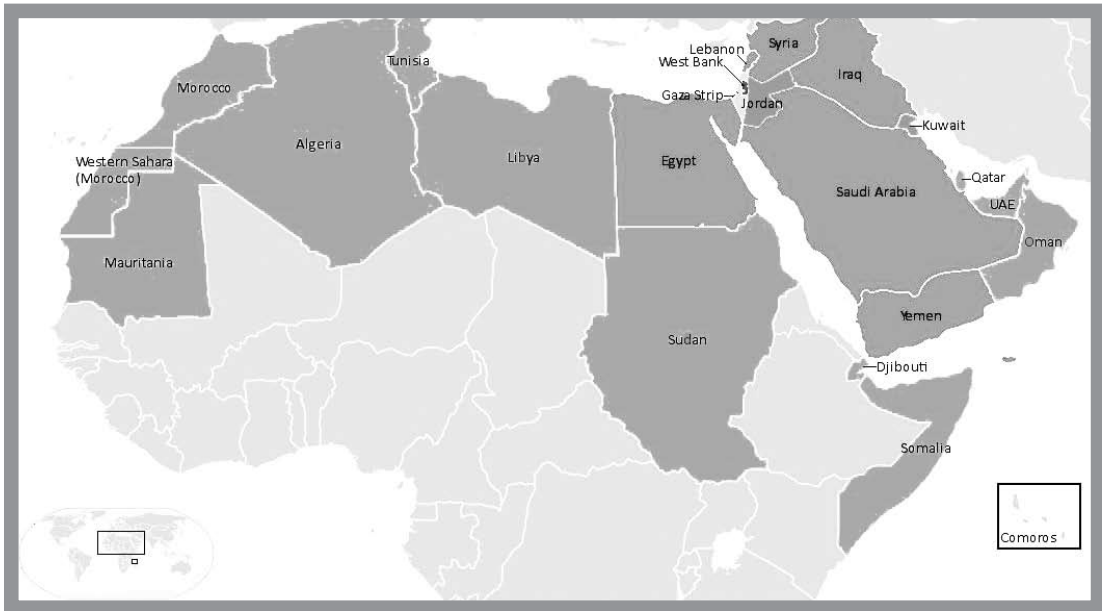
Born in Queens, New York, Grazda studied photography at the Rhode Island School of Design. Since the 1970s, his work has taken him to Latin America, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. His photographs have appeared in many publications and are in several museum collections, and he is the author of three books of photography.

http://www3.soros.org/photogalleries/mw_gallery.php?series=/resources/events/mwinternational/grazda/

Arabs, Muslims, and Islam

All of the young people in the book have Arab parents. Arabs are individuals who speak Arabic and are nationals of Arab states. These are in North Africa and the Middle East and were founded by descendents of the tribes of Arabia. While most Arabs are Muslims, and Islam's spiritual center is the Middle East, only around 20% of today's Muslims are Arabs.

Below is a map of the twenty two Arab States.



Many of the people in *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?* are Muslim. They practice Islam, which is the second largest religion in the world (after Christianity) in terms of the number of its adherents. This body of beliefs and practices originated in the 7th century as the religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad. His teachings and prophecy are compiled in the holy book, the Quran, which includes the laws, moral precepts, narratives, and many practical teachings that Muslims live by.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING

1. What surprised you most reading this book? Where there any misconceptions you personally had about Arabs or Muslims that were addressed?

2. The population of Vermont is not representative of the larger population of the United States. In what ways does this impact you as a student in Vermont?

3. A number of the people in the book were born in the US to immigrant parents. How do these backgrounds affect the identities of the young people in the book?

4. What similarities and differences do you see between this “problem” and the historical problems of prejudice in this country against other immigrant populations? How do you see the future of Arabs and Muslims in America?

5. Several people in the book mention either passing as Hispanic or another ethnicity. In what ways do you think this is a good tactic? In what ways is it destructive?

