

## **Arab Americans**

From 1909 to 1944, members of Arab American communities in the United States sought naturalized citizenship through an official recognition as white. During this period, the courts were inconsistent in defining Arabs as white granting some eligibility for citizenship, while denying others. Therefore, in the first half of the twentieth century, many Arabs were naturalized as "white American" citizens, while others were deported as "non-white aliens."

One of the earliest cases includes the case of police officer George Shishim. Born in Zahle, Lebanon, Shishim immigrated to the United States in 1894 becoming a police officer in Venice, CA. According to Gualtieri (2009), Shishim's "legal battle to prove his whiteness began after he arrested the son of a prominent lawyer for disturbing the peace." The man arrested argued that because Shishim was not white, and thus ineligible for citizenship, that his arrest was invalid. Shishim's attorney's, with support from the Syrian-Lebanese and Arab communities, argued Arabs shared Caucasian ancestry and are thus white. Judge Frank Hutton, who presided over the case, cited legal precedent ruling that the term "white person" included Syrians. Despite this ruling, neither U.S. immigration authorities nor courts across the country consistently defined Arabs as whites, and many Arabs continued to be deported through the 1940s.

Among the most important cases was *Dow v. United States* (1915) in which Syrian George Dow was determined to be of the "Caucasian" race and thus eligible for citizenship. In 1914, Judge Smith denied George Dow citizenship twice ruling that Syrians were not white and thus ineligible for citizenship. Dow appealed these decisions and in *Dow v. United States* (1915), the United States Court of Appeals overturned the lower court's decisions, defined Syrians as white, and affirmed Dow's right to naturalization. However, this decision did not apply to North Africans or non-Levantine Arabs, and some courts claimed that only Syrians (and not other Arab persons) were white. The situation was resolved in 1943, when all Arabs and North Africans were deemed white by the federal government. *Ex Parte Mohriez* (1944), and the 1977 OMB Directive 15 which includes Middle Eastern and North African in the definition of white.

## **Jewish Americans**

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the racial classification of Ashkenazi (European) and light-skinned Sephardic (Mediterranean and Middle Eastern) Jews in the United States was not settled. Various legal and social classifications categorized Ashkenazi and many Sephardi Jews as "Mongoloid," "Asiatic," "Slavonic" and of Semitic origins. Quota systems in the United States prevented Eastern European Jews from immigrating in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; during the Holocaust, the U.S. government turned away boat loads of primarily Ashkenazi Jewish children seeking refuge from concentration camps, sending them back to their deaths. After WWII, Ashkenazi Jews and light-skinned Sephardic Jews were slowly able to assimilate into whiteness, achieving recognition as "white" people and receiving the same benefits of life outcomes as other white ethnic groups. Jews of color, including some Sephardic Jews, all Mizrahi (N. African and Middle Eastern), all Beta Yisrael Jews (those from Ethiopia and Eritrea) and many Jews with Latinx, Black and Native heritage, continue to experience racism.

The racial status of Jews has continued to engender debate, with some commentators, and far-right leaders such as David Duke, arguing that all Jews are people of color. In 2013, more than 90% of U.S. Ashkenazi Jews described themselves as white. Mizrahi

## **Finnish Americans**

The earliest Finnish immigrants into the US were colonialists who were Swedes in the legal sense and perhaps spoke Swedish. They settled in the Swedish colony, and were supposed to have assimilated into the British culture quickly. More recent Finns were on several occasions "racially" discriminated against and not seen as white, but "Asian". The reasons for this were the arguments and theories about the Finns originally being of Mongolian instead of native European origin due to the Finnish language belonging to the Uralic and not the Indo-European language family.

On January 4, 1908, a trial was held in Minnesota about whether John Svan and several other Finnish immigrants would become naturalized United States citizens or not, as the process only was for "whites" and "blacks" in general, and district prosecutor John Sweet was of the opinion that Finnish immigrants were Mongols. The judge, William A. Cant, later concluded that the Finnish people may have been Mongolian from the beginning, but that the climate they lived in for a long time, and historical Finnish immigration and assimilation of Germanic tribes (Teutons)—which he considered modern "pure Finns" indistinguishable from—had made the Finnish population one of the whitest people in Europe. If the Finns had Mongol ancestry, it was distant and diluted. John Svan and the others were made naturalized US citizens, and from that day on, the law forbade treating Finnish immigrants and Americans of Finnish descent as not white.

In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a lot resentment from the local American population towards the Finnish settlers because they were seen as having very different customs, and were slow in learning English. Another reason was that many of them had come from the "red" side of Finland, and thus held socialist political views.

## **German Americans**

Large numbers of Germans migrated to North America between the 1680s and 1760s. Many settled in the English colony of Pennsylvania. In the 18th century, many persons of English descent harbored resentment towards the increasing number of German settlers. Benjamin Franklin in "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.", complained about the increasing influx of German Americans, stating that they had a negative influence on the early United States. The only exception were Germans of Saxon descent "*who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased*".

Unlike most European immigrant groups, whose acceptance as white came gradually over the course of the late 19th century (that is, in U.S. colloquial definitions, since all Europeans were white by legal U.S. definition), German immigrants quickly became accepted as white.

## **Italian Americans**

In certain parts of the South during the Jim Crow era, Southern Italians "occupied a racial middle ground within the otherwise unforgiving, binary caste system of white-over-black." Though Italians were viewed as white for purposes of naturalization and voting, their social standing was that they represented a "problem at best." Their racial status was impacted by their appearance and that they did not "act" white, engaging in manual labor ordinarily reserved for blacks. The trial of nineteen Italian immigrants for the murder of New Orleans police chief David Hennessy in 1890, which ended in the lynching of eleven of them by a white vigilante group, sparked debate in the press over Italians supposed racial characteristics. Italians continued to occupy a "middle ground in the racial order" through the 1920s.

## **Armenian Americans**

Another 1909 immigration and naturalization case found that Armenians were white and thus eligible for citizenship. A U.S. Circuit Court judge in Boston, ruling on a citizenship application by four Armenians, overruled government objections and found that West Asians were so mixed with Europeans that it was impossible to tell whether they were white or should be excluded as part of the "yellow race". In making the ruling, the judge also noted that the government had already made no objection to Jews. The judge ruled that "if aboriginal people of Asia are excluded it is hard to find a loophole for the admission of Hebrews."

## **Irish Americans**

Irish racism in Victorian Britain and 19th century United States included the stereotyping of the Irish as violent and alcoholic. Some English illustrators depicted a prehistoric "ape-like image" of Irish faces to bolster evolutionary racist claims that the Irish people were an "inferior race" as compared to Anglo-Saxons.

Similar to other immigrant populations, they were sometimes accused of cronyism and subjected to misrepresentations of their religious and cultural beliefs. Irish Catholics were particularly singled out for attack by Protestants.

Where many Irish immigrants settled following the Great Famine, anti-Irish prejudice was widespread. The sheer numbers of people coming across the Irish sea and settling in the poorer districts of the city led to physical attacks and it became common practice for those with Irish accents or even Irish names to be barred from jobs, public houses and employment opportunities.