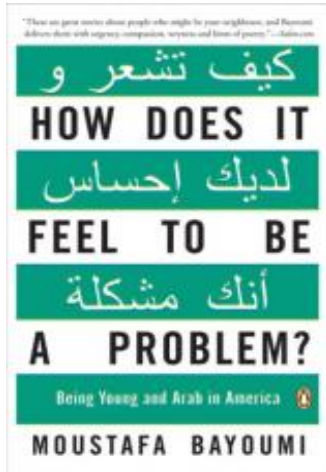


# How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America

by Moustafa Bayoumi



## About the Book

**An eye-opening look at how young Arab- and Muslim- Americans are forging lives for themselves in a country that often mistakes them for the enemy**

Just over a century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois posed a probing question in his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*: How does it feel to be a problem? Now, Moustafa Bayoumi asks the same about America's new "problem" --- Arab- and Muslim-Americans. Bayoumi takes readers into the lives of seven twenty-somethings living in Brooklyn, home to the largest Arab-American population in the United States. He moves beyond stereotypes and clichés to reveal their often unseen struggles, from being subjected to government surveillance to the indignities of workplace discrimination. Through it all, these young men and women persevere through triumphs and setbacks as they help weave the tapestry of a new society that is, at its heart, purely American.

## Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the similarities between this "problem" and the historical problems of prejudice in this country against African Americans, Native Americans, and Japanese Americans. What about differences? How do you see the future of Arabs and Muslims in America? What's our next step?
2. What surprised you most reading this book? Were there any misconceptions you personally had about Arabs or Muslims that were addressed?
3. Which of the individuals profiled here did you most identify with? Why?
4. If you'd been on the bus with Yasmin, would you have defended the woman with the baby? How could that situation

have been handled better?

5. One way Jews coped with accepted anti-Semitism was to assimilate as much as possible. Similarly, several people in the book mention either passing as Hispanic or another nationality (ethnicity?). In what ways is this a good tactic? In what ways is it destructive?

6. Discuss your impressions of Brooklyn. In what ways do you think the story would have been different if the author had chosen another location?

7. The author discussed the phenomenon of "middlemen minorities" (p. 122). What are some other examples? How do you think you would fare working extremely hard for a specific, and sometimes short-term, payoff?

8. Omar discusses people's reaction to his working for Al Jazeera. What is your impression of or opinion about that news organization? Have you ever seen their reporting? If not, what is informing your opinions?

9. It is suggested that congress will eventually have to apologize to Arab Americans for the government's treatment of them post-9/11. Do you foresee that happening? If so, when? Recall that congress did not officially apologize for slavery until July of 2008. If the government did eventually try to make amends, what would be suitable?

## Author Bio

Moustafa Bayoumi was born in Zürich, 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 coeditor 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.

## Critical Praise

"Moustafa Bayoumi's **How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?** has an intimate feel, as the author listens closely to the dreams and realities of seven young Arabs living in post-9/11 America."

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