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# HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A PROBLEM?

*Being Young and Arab in America*

by

Moustafa Bayoumi

## Advance Praise for *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?*

"[Bayoumi's] absorbing and affectionate book is a quintessentially American picture of 21<sup>st</sup>-century citizens."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Bayoumi offers a revealing portrait of life for people who are often scrutinized but seldom heard from."

—*Booklist*, starred review

"Bayoumi poignantly portrays young people coming of age."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Wholly intelligent and sensitively-drawn, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* is an important investigation into the hearts and minds of young Arab Americans. This significant and eminently readable work breaks through preconceptions and delivers a fresh take on a unique and vital community. Moustafa Bayoumi's voice is refreshingly frank, personable, and true."

—Diana Abu-Jaber, author of *Origin*, *Crescent*, and *The Language of Baklava*

"In relating the gripping personal stories of seven young Arab and Muslim Americans from Brooklyn in *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?*, Moustafa Bayoumi reveals the feelings and frustrations of the current era's scapegoats, who can be demonized, profiled, and reviled without fear of sanction. His book shows both the dimensions of this new problem for American society, and the hopeful signs that this problem too can be overcome."

—Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies, Columbia University, and author of *The Iron Cage*

"Suspenseful storytelling and rich detail make *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* required reading for Americans yearning for knowledge about Islam and their Muslim neighbors in the United States. In a series of fascinating narratives about the horrors and conflicts young Muslim-Americans faced after 9/11, Moustafa Bayoumi has written a work that is passionate, yet measured, humorous, and above all enlightening."

—Geneive Abdo, author of *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11*

"With deft prose, acute insight, and extensive reporting, Moustafa Bayoumi has produced truly engrossing portraits of young Muslim Americans about whom we usually hear only empty polemics. With a light touch, he gives voice to people who are referred to often and heard from rarely. The result is a sense of the tentative resistance of a besieged generation, as well as their determination to force America to be true to its promise even if it means confronting prejudice in its practice."

—Gary Younge, author of *Stranger in a Strange Land: Encounters in the Disunited States and No Place Like Home*

How does it feel to be a problem? How does it feel to be forced to resign as a class officer at your public high school because you are Muslim and your faith prevents you from attending mandatory dances? How does it feel to be an Arab-American Christian soldier fighting in Iraq? How does it feel to be released from prison three months after you and your family are rounded up in the middle of the night and incarcerated, when your only “crime” is being an Arab-American in post-September 11<sup>th</sup> America? How does it feel, to be a problem? W.E.B. Du Bois first posed this question in his seminal treatise *The Souls of Black Folk*, and now, over a century later, Moustafa Bayoumi explores the same question through the first-hand accounts of seven young Arab-Americans living in Brooklyn. Their answers reveal the passions, frustrations, struggles, aspirations, and ultimately, the undeterred hope harbored by the inspiring young people featured in Bayoumi’s portraits.

In **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A PROBLEM? Being Young and Arab in America** (The Penguin Press; August 18, 2008; \$24.95), Bayoumi introduces us to Rasha, Sami, Lina, Akram, Yasmin, Omar, and Rami, whose stories reveal complex individuals behind the stereotypes that plague Arabs and Muslims in the United States. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, these two groups have reluctantly formed what Bayoumi calls the first new community of suspicion to emerge since the hard-won victories of the Civil Rights era. The lives of Bayoumi’s subjects are complicated by adversities that are at once familiar and unprecedented: government surveillance and detentions, workplace discrimination, warfare in their countries of origin, threats of vigilante violence, the infiltration of spies and informants into their midst, and the disappearance of friends or family.

And yet each of Bayoumi’s portraits is a quintessential American story of race, religion, and civil rights, full of struggle and also hope. This is a community that lives next door, and yet a world away, and the combined testimony of Bayoumi’s subjects begins to bridge this distance. **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A PROBLEM?** is an important and necessary book, in which Bayoumi’s subjects answer Du Bois’s century-old question, just as they start to grasp how it feels to be a part of the solution.

#### **About the Author**

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 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.

### **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A PROBLEM?**

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