

James Zogby, *Arab Voices: What They Are Saying to Us, and Why It Matters* (Houndmills, Basingstoke [UK]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 256 pp. ISBN: 978-0230102996. US\$15.42.

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James Zogby, the author of the book under review, has an enthralling career worth mentioning here. His ancestors emigrated to the United States from Lebanon. His father, a Catholic Lebanese Arab, entered the United States illegally in 1922, but eventually obtained citizenship through a government policy of amnesty. James Zogby himself was born in 1945 in Utica, New York and attended college in Syracuse, New York where he graduated in 1967 with a bachelor's degree in economics. He went on to earn his PhD in comparative religions from Temple University in 1975. During the late 1970s, Zogby was a founding member and leader of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign. In 1980, he co-founded the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and served as executive director until 1984.

James Zogby is the founder and president of the Arab American Institute (AAI), a Washington DC-based organisation, which serves as a political and policy research arm of the Arab-American community. The establishment of AAI came out of his own family's exposure to stereotyping of Middle Eastern-looking people as terrorists following the tragedy at the 1972 Munich Summer Olympic games. He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Democratic National Committee. In 1984 and 1988, Zogby served as Deputy Campaign Manager and Senior Advisor to the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. He also served as Al Gore's Senior Advisor on Ethnic Outreach, a post he also held in the 2008 Obama Campaign. Moreover, he was a delegate to the 2008 Democratic National Convention. Zogby has also addressed the United Nations and other international forums. He has authored several books, including *What Ethnic Americans Really Think (The Zogby Culture Polls)* and *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns*. His brother John Zogby is the founder, president and CEO of Zogby International, a polling firm known for both phone polling and interactive, Internet-based polling.

Thanks to his experience in the region, his personal origins, and perhaps above all due to his manifold activities in the United States, Zogby is uniquely positioned to present rarely heard voices, *Arab Voices*, which is his latest book. Throughout his book, he argues that the Arab world is a region that has been vastly misunderstood in the West. *Arab Voices* has appeared 'just in time', just before the start of the popular uprisings that swept the Arab world in early 2011. Many analysts of the region – in particular those in the West – were surprised by the determination of the demonstrators for civil rights and democracy, rather than for a theocratic political

system. However, how can we expect to understand a vast region of the world if we have already decided what we think they believe and what motivates them? Zogby's book asks us instead to *listen* to them. It also offers insights on how the West can choose to approach the region differently in the future.

His book seems to be directed at a mainly American audience and is based on the outcomes of a poll by Zogby International of Arabs in the United States and in the Middle East. The results were carefully analysed and distilled into a current primer of Arab opinion to which Zogby added his own personal experiences and political involvement. Through this book Zogby opens many doors to Americans to allow them to hear not only *what* Arabs think about them, but *why* they think the way they do. Using his own background as an Arab-American, Zogby's book reveals an in-depth look at the world as seen through Arab eyes. Straight-talking, but never strident, he discusses prejudice against Arabs (and by Arabs) and the desperate need for basic understanding.

Arab Voices is divided into two sections, one dispelling 'Arab myths' and the other presenting current situations in four Arab countries – Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine – and the Arab American community. *Arab Voices* borrows equally from the study of history, anthropology, sociology, statistics, and political science. In a little over 200 pages, Zogby weaves these fundamental parts into an integrated whole. His book also explains why so much of America's Middle East policy has failed. Unlike so many other books or articles that have been written about this region, Zogby's book is neither a retelling (or an interpretation) of history nor is it a collection of personal anecdotes. His starting point had been hard data. He asked several hundreds of Arabs about their attitudes toward the United States, to identify their most important political concerns, their attitudes toward women in the workplace or what programs they watch on TV. Ironically, in a book bolstered by polling data, perhaps the strongest chapters in the book are those on Lebanon and Arab Americans, because here the author has a wealth of personal experience and family history to draw upon. Here the vivid anecdotes and the author's emotional connection make this material come to life for the benefit of the reader.

As a blueprint for what must be done to change minds and to change policy in the United States and abroad *Arab Voices* is rather unique. Zogby convincingly shows that Americans often tend to project their fears and desires onto Arabs and Muslims, although one could well argue that the latter two have also to do their share to make mutual understanding a reality (anti-Western conspiracy theories and alike come to mind).

In closing, Zogby has written a solicitous book about how Arabs view Americans, themselves and their own future. As some Americans and other people of good will in 'the West' are currently looking for answers to the manifold crises in the Middle East in a variety of sources and work to overcome their lack of knowledge on Arabs and their region, *Arab Voices* will be of help to find them.