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Palestinian and Jewish Israeli-born Immigrants in the United States[1]

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This article considers both Arab and Jewish emigration from Israel to the United States, relying on the 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1980 U.S. census. Using the ancestry and language questions to identify Jews and Arabs, we found that over 30 percent of Israeli-born Americans are Palestinian-Arab natives of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. While the Jews are of higher educational levels, hold better jobs and enjoy higher incomes than their Arab counterparts, both groups have relatively high socioeconomic characteristics. Both have high rates of self-employment, particularly the Palestinian-Arabs, who appear to serve as middlemen minority in the grocery store business in the cities where they reside. The fact that nearly a third of Israeli-born immigrants are Arabs accounts for the occupational diversity previously observed of Israelis in America but does not account for their income diversity as much as does differences between early and recent immigrants.

In the first three decades of Israel's existence (1948–1979), between 238,000 and 347,000 of its residents emigrated; the United States was the main country of destination, accounting for 50 to 60 percent of the Israeli emigrants (Paltiel, 1986). The 1980 U.S. Census of Population enumerated some 67,000 native Israelis in America in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985), over half of whom arrived during the 1970s. Estimates for the total number of Israelis in the United States in 1980 are, of course, higher and range between 100,000 and 150,000 (Herman and LaFontaine, 1983; Eisenbach, 1988).

Given these figures and the fact that large-scale emigration is inconsistent with Zionism, the dominant ideology in Israel, it is not surprising that in recent years Israeli emigration to the United States has been studied extensively by Israeli and American social scientists (*e.g.*, Cohen, 1988a, 1988b, 1989; Elizur, 1980; Eisenbach, 1988; Fein, 1978; Freedman and Korazim, 1986; Kass and Lipset, 1979; Ritterband, 1978, 1986; Sobel, 1986; Shokeid, 1988). Despite many differences between these studies, all focused on Jewish immigrants in the United States and ignored Arab emigrants. In fact, the vast annotated bibliography on emigration from Israel, published by the Sald Institute (1989), does not contain a single item discussing emigration of Israeli Arabs. Yet Israeli Arabs comprised about 12 and 16 percent of

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the Israeli population in 1950 and 1980,[2] respectively, and about 10 percent of all Israeli emigrants during the years 1948–1984 (Eisenbach, 1988).

This article focuses on Jewish and Arab emigration from Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip to the United States. The first part presents the subset of 1980 U.S. census that contains Israeli-born immigrants. It emphasizes that the group of "Israeli-born" in the U.S. census includes, in addition to Jews and Arabs who were born in Israel, some Palestinian natives of the Gaza Strip and, more commonly, of the West Bank.[3] Next is detailed how, by using the ancestry and language questions, we identified Jewish and Arab immigrants in this sample and arrived at an estimate of over 30 percent Arabs among Israeli-born immigrants in the United States. Finally, the socioeconomic characteristics of the two immigrant populations are compared. This is the first systematic description of the socioeconomic characteristics of Palestinians in the United States and an improvement over previous presentations of the Israeli-born in the United States as implicitly Jews.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ISRAELI-BORN AMERICANS

Israeli immigrants are considered to be a very successful immigrant group in the United States (*e.g.*, Kass and Lipset, 1979; Ritterband, 1986; Fein, 1978). Indeed, the unpublished tabulations of the Israeli-born population enumerated by the 1980 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985), reveal that the average Israeli-born American is more educated, holds a more prestigious job, and has a higher family income than immigrants from most other countries, including European (Cohen, 1988a). A closer examination of the data, however, reveals that Israeli-born Americans are considerably more diverse than European immigrants with respect to income and, in particular, occupation. While Israeli-born male immigrants were twice as likely as other American workers to work in one of the top two occupational categories (professionals and managers), they were also three times as likely as other American workers to be in sales occupations. Likewise, while the mean family income of Israeli-born immigrants in 1980 was higher than the average for European immigrants, Israelis suffer from poverty more than Europeans who immigrated to the United States during the same period (Cohen, 1988; 1989).

This body of research, however, was unable to distinguish between Jewish and Arab immigrants. This being the case, the analyses grouped together Jewish and Arab immigrants, assuming that Arabs were an insignificant portion of the total, not comprising more than 8 percent of Israeli-born in the New York area (Ritterband, 1986) or 10 to 20 percent in the entire United States (Eisenbach, 1988; Cohen, 1989). However, as we demonstrate below, the proportion of Israeli-born Palestinian Arabs in the 1980 U.S. census is much higher than assumed by past research. It is therefore possible that the inclusion of Palestinian Arabs could account for all these previous

[2]The figure for 1980 includes about 120,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem (Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1984).

[3]The terms Arabs, Palestinians, and Palestinian Arabs are used interchangeably.

observations: the crowding of Israeli-born immigrants in sales occupations, their high poverty rates, and the consequent diversity of socioeconomic characteristics.

IDENTIFYING ARAB AND JEWISH IMMIGRANTS FROM ISRAEL

The 1980 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) is a 5 percent sample of the 1980 U.S. census. We use a subset of this sample containing all 3,513 Israeli-born men and women immigrants of all ages, both Jewish and Arab. In classifying country of birth, the census relies on self reports. Any person specifying Israel as his or her country of birth is classified as such. Classification of Palestinian immigrants' country of birth, however, is tricky. Those reporting Gaza Strip as their country of birth are classified as such by the census (only 6 persons in the 1980 census reported Gaza as their place of birth, and they are not included in the analysis below); those reporting the West Bank are classified as having being born in an "unspecified" country, and those reporting Palestine or Israel are coded as Israeli-born. Surely, many natives of the West Bank and Gaza Strip view these territories as part of Arab Palestine. Therefore they, like some Israeli Arabs and Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war who immigrated to the United States, are likely to report "Palestine" rather than Jordan, Egypt, West Bank, or Gaza Strip as their country of birth. In short, all those reporting Israel or Palestine as their country of birth are classified as Israeli-born in the 1980 U.S. census. They probably include all Israeli-born Jews, all Israeli Arabs, as well as many if not most natives of the West Bank and Gaza Strip who, by 1980, felt it appropriate to state Palestine rather than Egypt or Jordan as their country of birth.

The ancestry and language questions of the 1980 census enable a fairly accurate identification of Jews and Arabs among the Israeli-born. In the first stage, we define as Arabs all those who speak Arabic or Armenian at home and as Jews all Hebrew or Yiddish speakers. Classifying all Arabic speakers as Arabs would have been problematic had the U.S. census included Jewish immigrants born in Arabic speaking countries. But since the sample is limited to Israeli-born, the assumption that Jews born in Israel rarely speak Arabic at home is justified. Likewise, only a negligible minority of Israeli Arabs have a better command of Hebrew than of Arabic. Therefore, the assumption that all Hebrew speakers are Jews appears to be correct.

In the second stage, we used the ancestry questions. Among those not speaking one of the languages stated above, Arabs are defined as all those who stated their first or second ancestry as "Arabian," "Palestinian," or "Armenian"; Jews are all those choosing any different ancestry.

To be sure, most individuals who speak Arabic in their new American homes also state an Arabian and/or Palestinian ancestry. As shown in Table 1, the results indicate that there are only 4 percent Arabic speakers among those who stated an Israeli ancestry, as opposed to some 86–87 percent who stated an Arabian or Palestinian ancestry. We take the former to be Israeli Arabs. Likewise, most Hebrew and Yiddish speakers tend to choose between Israeli, some specific other ancestry, or *998*.[4]

[4]Those receiving the *998* code are probably Jews who stated "Jewish" as their ancestry. Since Judaism is not a recognized ancestry, many were coded as *998*. That this is the case is evidenced by the high proportion of such persons speaking Hebrew, Yiddish or only English, but not Arabic.

TABLE 1
FIRST ANCESTRY BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME: ISRAELI-BORN IN THE U.S. 1980 CENSUS (PERCENTAGES)

Ancestry	Languages							
	English	Hebrew	Yiddish	Arabic	Armenian	Other	Total	N
Israeli	20	66	7	4	0	2	100	893
Arabian	8	3	0	87	0	3	100	474
Palestinian	9	1	1	86	0	4	100	366
Armenian	5	0	0	3	90	3	100	78
Other	31	41	8	8	1	12	100	1,179
998	22	53	12	10	0	3	100	523
Total	730	1,364	221	906	82	210	100	3,513

However, for some individuals the combination of language and ancestry raises a problem, as in the cases of Yiddish speakers stating an Arabian ancestry or of Hebrew speakers stating a Palestinian ancestry. There are twenty such cases, which represents less than 1 percent of the sample, and we exclude them from the analysis. Thus, of the remaining 3,493 Israeli-born in the census sample, this selection procedure identifies 1,097 (31.4%) Palestinian Arabs[5] and 2,396 (68.6%) Jews. These estimates are appreciably higher than those reported by previous research on the basis of indirect data – between 10 percent (Eisenbach, 1988) and 20 percent Arabs (Cohen, 1988a; 1989). Thus we take the current estimate of 31 percent Arabs and 69 percent Jews as the true proportion of Jews and Palestinians among the Israeli-born American population in the 1980 U.S. census. Unfortunately, it is not possible to distinguish with the same level of accuracy between the three Palestinian subgroups – Israeli Arabs, Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war, and natives of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF JEWISH AND ARAB IMMIGRANTS

Table 2 tells a clear story. Jewish and Arab immigrants from Israel and the Occupied Territories are quite similar demographically. Both immigrant groups have high sex ratios (more males). In this they are like other Middle Eastern immigrant groups in the United States and unlike European immigrants, who are disproportionately female. Both groups have similar propensity to be married and an age structure unlike that of either Israel or the United States, with people concentrated in the prime adult working years and, especially, with children strikingly missing among the Arabs. The children of these families were born in America.

Both immigrant populations have the basis for established networks of their own kind, with sizable proportions in America 20 years or more. One in fourteen Jews is

[5]There are 78 Armenians among the 1,097 Palestinians. Since Armenians are viewed, at least in Israel, as part of the Arab minority, we included them in sample.

TABLE 2

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF JEWISH AND ARAB IMMIGRANTS OF ISRAELI BIRTH (1980 U.S. CENSUS)

	Jews	Arabs
Number of cases	2,396	1,097
Variable		
% of Sample	68.6	31.4
% Male	53.8	60.6
% Married (20+)	73.3	69.5
Age		
% Below 15	18.9	7.2
% 25–44	50.4	49.3
% Over 65	5.7	6.7
Mean age	30.1	36.5
Median age	29.0	35.0
Time of arrival		
% American parents	7.1	0.7
% 1975–1980	32.0	33.0
% 1970–1974	15.9	20.1
% 1965–1969	12.1	20.2
% before 1965	32.9	25.9
Citizenship		
% Naturalized	48.1	53.5
% American parents	7.1	0.7
SMSA*		
% New York	35.3	9.5
% Los Angeles	15.3	11.2
% Chicago	3.5	11.4
% Detroit	1.2	6.7
% San Francisco	2.2	8.6
% Washington, D.C.	2.8	3.3

*Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area

TABLE 3

EDUCATION AND LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS, JEWISH AND ARAB PERSONS OF ISRAELI BIRTH, 25–64 YEARS OLD, (1980 U.S. CENSUS)

	Men		Women	
	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs
Education				
% Elementary or less	3.9	14.5	5.0	26.9
% College or above	49.4	34.9	37.7	11.0
% Mean years of schooling	14.9	13.3	14.1	10.8
% English "well" or above	97.1	83.9	95.7	74.4
% Students	14.1	7.3	11.1	4.6
Labor Force Participation				
% In labor force	90.7	89.4	54.1	40.1
Mean annual hours[a]	2,079	2,261	1,467	1,777
Occupation[a]				
% Managers, executive, professional, and technical	55.6	39.9	56.5	30.9
% Sales workers	16.8	25.9	12.9	23.4
% Clerical workers	3.4	3.5	18.0	15.9
% Service workers	3.0	8.0	6.0	9.6
% Farmers and farmworkers	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.0
% Blue collar workers	21.1	22.7	6.9	20.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
% Self-employed[a]	24.9	36.2	8.2	12.8
% Grocers	1.2	33.8	[b]	[b]
% Other retail trade	23.1	29.7	[b]	[b]
Wages and Poverty Status				
Mean hourly wage ($)[a]	11.1	9.6	10.6	6.5
% below poverty	16.3	19.1	16.2	20.3

[a] Of those working.
[b] Number of cases too small.

not an immigrant at all, but an American born abroad, possibly to parents whose own emigration to Israel did not work out. About one third of both the Arabs and the Jews arrived in the United States within five years of the census in which they were counted. Palestinian Arabs and Jews born in Israel and the Occupied Territories go to different places once they get to the United States. It is really very simple: Jewish Israelis go where Jews are (New York City and Los Angeles), Arabs go where Arabs are (Midwestern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Toledo and to the San Francisco Bay Area). Both groups avoid rural areas (as do most immigrants) and the South except for Florida, Texas, and those parts of Virginia close to Washington DC. The Arabs are less geographically concentrated than the Jews, over half of whom live in or near either New York City or Los Angeles.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF JEWISH AND ARAB IMMIGRANTS

Table 3 describes the socioeconomic characteristics of the two immigrant populations by gender. Except for Arab women, these groups include many well-educated people. Fully 49 percent of the Jewish men have at least graduated from college, possessing a level of human capital matched by 38 percent of the Jewish women and 35 percent of the Arab men. These figures are a good deal higher than comparable figures for Arabs and Jews in Israel or for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip (Israel, 1984). At the other end of the educational distribution (the bottom), Arabs are overrepresented, with 15 percent of men having no more than an eighth grade education and fully 27 percent of Arab women having the same.

Education is converted into income through participation in the labor force. Among adults (persons aged 25–65), about 90 percent of both Jewish and Arab men worked in the year before the census. Jewish women, with more educational credentials and better command of the English language, are also more likely to work than Arab women. Among those working, Arabs men and women work more hours than Jews.

The occupational distribution of the two immigrant groups corroborates the notion that Israeli immigrants in the United States are doing well. Fully 56 percent of Jewish men and women and 40 percent of Arab men are either professional, technical, or managerial workers. On the other hand, as demonstrated by previous research, Israeli-born immigrants in America also tend to concentrate in sales occupations. This is principally due to a propensity of Arab men and women to be in these occupations (26% and 23%, respectively), although Jewish men, too, are over twice as likely as other American men to be sales workers (16% compared to 6%; Cohen, 1989). The concentration of Arabs in sales is even more marked when industry data are examined. Nearly one of two Palestinian workers in America engages in trade, compared to one in five among both Israeli Jewish immigrants and the total American labor force (data not shown). A closer look at immigrant men, particularly the Palestinian Arabs, is thus in order.

Detailed occupational classification suggests that 63 percent of the 104 Arab

immigrant men in sales are "supervisors and proprietors." Detailed industry classification adds that 40 percent of the 182 Arab men in retail and wholesale trades are engaged in a single three-digit business – grocery stores. No such concentration among Jewish sales workers exists; the 156 Jewish men in retail and wholesale trades are involved in a variety of businesses, and no more than 10 percent of them engage in any single three-digit industry.

Patterns of self-employment clarifies the differences between the two immigrant groups. Fully 36 percent of Arab men in the labor force are self-employed. Not only is this proportion higher than the proportion among Jewish men (25%), native men (11.4%), and all immigrant men (12.2%), it is higher than the proportions of any of the 42 immigrant groups listed in Borjas (1990:237). Not surprisingly, Arabs tend to be in retail trade and the Jewish self-employed are engaged in a broad range of businesses. For example, of the 145 self-employed Palestinians in the sample, fully 64 percent are in retail trade, compared to 17 percent among natives, 27 percent among all immigrants (Borjas, 1990), and 33 percent among self-employed Israeli-born Jewish immigrants. More importantly, over half of the self-employed Palestinians in retail trade own grocery stores and 70 percent of them own either grocery stores or restaurants.

By contrast, no more than 10 percent of self-employed Jewish immigrants from Israel engage in any same line of business. In fact, the highest concentration of self-employed Jews is in construction, and not in the retail or wholesale trades. In short, the occupational, industry, and self-employment patterns of the two immigrant groups suggest that they are similar to other Middle Eastern immigrants in their entrepreneurial tendencies. There are, however, major differences in the industrial expression of this entrepreneurship. Arabs tend to operate within a specific niche of the economy – the grocery store industry – in a few SMSAs. Israeli-born Jewish immigrants, although more concentrated geographically than their Arab counterparts, do not concentrate in any specific line of business and are spread out across the economy more evenly.

Turning to wage rates, it seems that the differences between Jewish and Arab immigrants in the United States are relatively small (much smaller than the differences between Jews and Arabs in Israel). Among women, the differences between the wage rates of Jewish and Arab immigrants are larger, but so are differences in the human capital of the two groups of women immigrants.[6] More Palestinian than Jewish-Israeli immigrants are below the poverty line in America, but the differences are relatively small.

Average family income by year of immigration is provided in Table 4. Unlike individual income or wages, this measure includes the income of immigrant spouses, some of whom are native-born Americans. It is thus a better measure than individual income or wages for assessing one's economic well-being. The average income figures suggest that Jewish and Arab immigrants in America are doing well. Both groups have

[6]In separate wage regressions for men and women, including age, education, year of immigration, and ability to speak English, the coefficients for being Arab were not statistically significant.

TABLE 4

FAMILY INCOME: JEWISH AND ARAB FAMILIES IN THE U.S., BY YEAR OF ARRIVAL TO THE U.S., 1979 (AT LEAST ONE SPOUSE ISRAELI-BORN)

	Jews				Arabs			
Year of Arrival	All (1)	75–79 (2)	60–74 (3)	Before 1960 (4)	All (5)	75–79 (6)	60–74 (7)	Before 1960 (8)
N	1,229	329	505	363	692	169	376	(141)
Mean income ($)[a]	27.2	18.2	28.7	32.1	25.4	17.2	26.9	30.0
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$50,000 or more	13.1	3.6	14.5	18.7	10.7	3.6	12.2	13.5
$35,000–$49,999	13.6	6.4	16.4	15.7	13.7	6.5	13.0	24.1
$20,000–$34,999	33.1	29.2	33.3	36.4	31.2	24.3	32.7	36.2
$10,000–$19,999	24.0	30.7	22.8	20.4	24.6	29.6	27.4	11.3
$ 5,000–$ 9,999	9.7	15.2	8.5	6.9	10.0	17.2	7.7	7.8
Less than $5,000	6.5	14.8	4.6	2.0	9.8	19.1	6.9	7.1

[a]In thousands. Maximum income for any family is $75,000, as the distribution was truncated at this value by the Bureau of the Census.

family incomes which are higher than enjoyed by the average immigrant family from Europe, America, or Asia. The differences between Jews and Arabs are small. In every wave of immigration of the Israeli-born to the United States, Jews are doing slightly better than their Palestinian-Arab counterparts. In both groups, those arriving earlier enjoy much higher incomes than recent immigrants arriving between 1975–1980. In fact, incomes of recent immigrants are very low compared to recent European immigrants, and it is unclear whether recent Palestinian and Jewish immigrants from Israel will attain the income levels achieved by their predecessors.

What is interesting in the context of this article is that the income distributions of the two immigrant groups are not that different. Figure I presents family income distributions for all married immigrants by year of immigration. The between-graph differences (between immigrants of different cohorts) are greater than the within-graph differences (between Jewish and Arab immigrants of the same cohort). The income diversity found among all Israeli-born immigrants in America (Cohen, 1988a) is not a consequence of the ethnic composition of Israeli-born with high income Jews and low income Arabs, but it exists within both immigrant groups. It is, however, exacerbated by the differences among the three immigrant cohorts.

CONCLUSION

We have shown that nearly one out of three Israeli-born immigrants enumerated by the 1980 census is a Palestinian Arab rather than a Jewish immigrant. In Israel, the

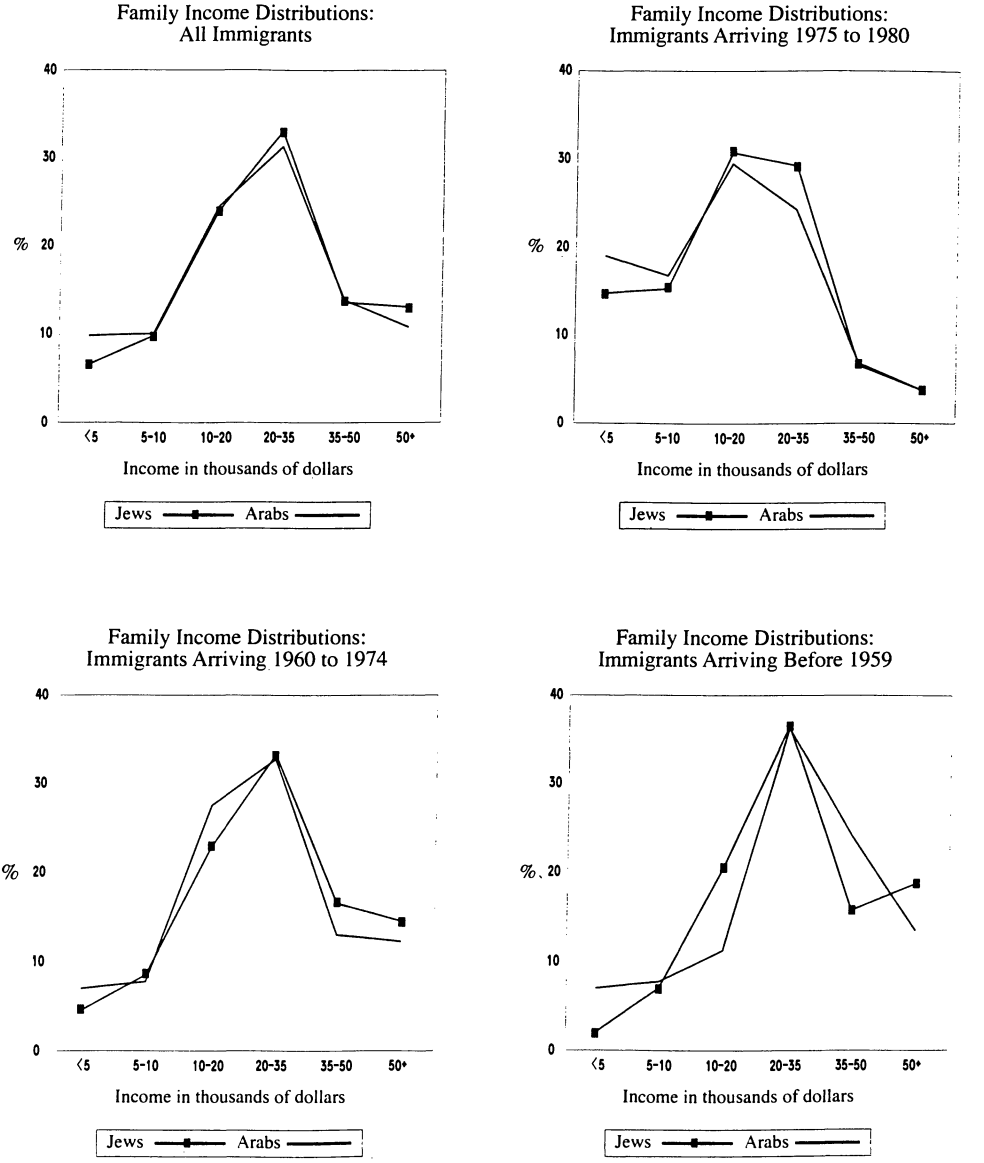

FIGURE I. FAMILY INCOME DISTRIBUTIONS

socioeconomic characteristics of Israeli-born Jews are much higher than those of Palestinian Arabs – both citizens of Israel and those under occupation (Israel, 1984). These differences appear to be much smaller among Jews and Palestinian Arabs who immigrated to the United States.[7] Both immigrant groups do quite well socioeconomically in their new country.

However, there is an important difference between the two immigrant groups with respect to economic assimilation in America. The occupational, industry, and self-employment data suggests that Palestinian Arabs, like other well-studied immigrant groups, have very high rates of self-employment in one type of business in the main cities in which they reside. In the migration literature, such concentration of one immigrant group in one line of business, where new arrivals work for the veteran immigrants, is said to give rise to either an entrepreneurial ethnic enclave or a middleman minority (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). Many Palestinian Arabs, both in the cities in which they are concentrated (New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles) and elsewhere in the country, seem to be part of this middlemen minority of grocers, much as Koreans, for example, dominate the produce market in New York City.

Israeli-born Jews in the United States also have high rates of self-employment and of being sales workers but not nearly as high as Palestinian Arabs. More importantly, Israeli Jews in the United States, whether salaried or self-employed, are not crowded into one or a few lines of business, detailed occupations, or industries. They are spread out across the entire economy. Whereas 50 percent of both men and women hold a managerial, professional, or technical job, what they manage varies broadly. Taken together, the results suggest that the two immigrant groups achieve relatively high levels of economic success in the United States but, at least for the self-employed, via somewhat different roads. Self-employed Jewish immigrants own small businesses in a variety of industries. They do not concentrate in one or two lines of business and cannot benefit from the advantages ethnic groups possess by occupying a specific niche of the market for particular goods. Palestinian Arabs tend to own small businesses more than any immigrant group in America. Unlike Jewish immigrant businessmen, however, most self-employed Palestinian immigrants in America flock into the grocery store businesses, where they appear to comprise a sizable proportion of the stores in certain markets. Census data does not enable us to determine the proportion of Jewish and Arab immigrants working for their fellow nationals owning small businesses. Experience of other immigrant groups, however, suggests that the proportion is probably not negligible. The implications of such ethnic enclaves have been studied for other immigrant groups in America.

Finally, with respect to what Jewish and Arab Israelis do in the United States, the two groups are quite different; however, with respect to their economic outcomes, they are remarkably similar. The unusual occupational and income diversity of Israeli immigrants is thus partly a function of the ethnic composition of Israeli immigrants;

[7]This is, at least in part, due to lack of discrimination against Arabs in America relative to the situation in Israel (Khalidi, 1988; Kretzmer, 1990; Lustick, 1980). It is also possible that the selection of Palestinian Arabs from Israel to the United States is relatively more favorable than the selection of Israeli Jews.

the occupational diversity is largely created by ethnic differences. The income diversity found among the total of Israeli-born immigrants in America is due less to differences between immigrant groups than to differences between immigrant cohorts.

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