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Immigration Issues Debated at Alwan for the Arts

Amnesty, border security and the future of 'our civilization' discussed in free-wheeling focus group

By Inni Chowdhury

Professionals and scholars were brought together by Alwan for the Arts, an Arab awareness group, on Thursday June 26 to discuss immigration in the United States. Alwan had previously organized three similar events, with the intention of promoting frank discussion among the participants. The focus group included residents from Long Island, Westchester County and Manhattan, hailing from backgrounds as diverse as medicine, finance, real estate, art and law.

Keywords: [Analysis](#), [Manhattan](#), [Human Rights](#), [Immigration](#),

By Inni Chowdhury

Professionals and scholars were brought together by Alwan for the Arts, an Arab awareness group, on Thursday June 26 to discuss immigration in the United States. Dr. Anny Bakalian, Associate Director of Middle East & Middle Eastern American Center at CUNY, and Ahmed Issawi, board member for the non-profit organization, hosted the event.

Alwan had previously organized three similar events, with the intention of promoting frank discussion among the participants. The focus group included residents from Long Island, Westchester County and Manhattan, hailing from backgrounds as diverse as medicine, finance, real estate, art and law. The nearly 20 panelists were there to address their questions to experts on immigration-related issues, including: Mehdi Bozorgmehr, Associate Professor of Sociology, Philip Kasinitz, professor of Sociology, and John H. Mollenkopf, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, all at the CUNY Graduate Center. Also there to lend her voice on the issue was Maritsa Poros, Assistant Professor of Sociology at City College.

In terms of the economic impact on the country, Professor Kasinitz says one would be hard pressed to find an economist who would say, "immigration is not a positive on the whole." The cultural impact comes down to the 2nd generation. He cited a recent New York Times study that showed that adult children of immigrants "are rapidly entering the mainstream and doing better than their parents- even out performing native born Americans in many cases. "The future doesn't look too different from the past."

Professor Bozorgmehr said the issue of immigration has been stuck on the federal level for years with no new legislation being passed. As the immigrant population has fanned out throughout the United States, "we have small towns passing out laws against immigrants; xenophobes and opportunists are latching onto the issue of immigration as linked to terrorism." This is ironic because all of the September 11 hijackers were documented and had legal entry.

Another contentious issue among the group was the issue of lower-skilled immigrants arriving in America. In the view of one focus group member named David from Southampton, it is important that while allowing immigrants into this country, "we need to preserve our civilization. We want those who will make us a stronger nation" Professor Kasinitz thought this was unreasonable. "We brought labor. We got people. Inevitably we must sort out the people."

Like the government that cannot decide on what to do next, experts and the focus group members were also at a loss. Some believed that border security was paramount, and more pressure should be placed on the Mexican government to provide for its own people. Others believed a form of amnesty was inevitable. The worst thing, Professor Kasinitz said, "a country can do is create a semi-permanent minority of people integrated economically, socially but not politically. That way lies South Africa." The discussion will surely continue elsewhere.

Alwan for the Arts is located at 16 Beaver Street in the Financial District.

By Inni Chowdhury
<http://www.alwanforthearts.org>

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July 28 at 7pm Bluestockings Books

What Bush's (and Obama's) War on Drugs in Colombia & Mexico are really about
and

What Friends of Brad Will and other groups are doing about it

A year and a half after activist journalist Brad Will was killed in Oaxaca Mexico in broad daylight in front of numerous witnesses, his murderers have yet to be tried. A year almost to the day after Brad was killed, President Bush has introduced the Merida Initiative (aka Plan Mexico) a massive 'drug war' initiative modeled on Plan Colombia, which would arm and train the very security forces and government responsible for Brad's murder and many others.

Find out how the Democratic Congress responded. Find out what certain well-known 'human rights' organizations did.

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Friends of Brad Will is a nationwide movement working in Brad's memory to demand accountability for his murder and opposing Plan Mexico. Fellowship for Reconciliation is an organization committed to the achieving of a just and peaceful world community, with full dignity and freedom for every human being. It has been working against Plan Colombia and Plan Mexico.

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