

Running head: PROJECT 3

Exploring the Iranian Culture

Derek Scott Spalla

North Georgia College and State University

Language Assimilation and Culture 1 - Summer 2009 MLAN-6100-OLA

Dr. Kristi Hislope

July 20, 2009

Exploring the Iranian Culture

A Brief History of Iranian Immigration

Iranian immigration to the United States has taken place in two major waves. The first wave started in the mid-1950s and continued until the start of the Islamic Revolution. This first wave primarily consisted of college students hoping to capitalize on Iran's growing oil based economy and families associated with the monarchy of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah. The population of this first wave was approximately 34,000 persons (Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006).

The second and larger of the two Iranian immigration waves began with the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979) and runs up to the present time. This wave has consisted of exiles, political refugees, and asylum seekers; and has numbered approximately 330,000 persons. The exiles in this wave were largely religious and ethnic minorities made up of Bahai, Jews, Armenians, and Assyrians (Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006). This wave also included young men fleeing military service and potential death in the violent Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).

Since 1970, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security shows a steady increase in Iranian immigration to the U.S. with a sharp peak in 1990. After 1990 the numbers of Iranian immigrants sharply declines for a decade, dropping well below 10,000 (see Figure 1). In 2000, the Iranian immigration to the U.S.

surprisingly begins to climb again, peaking in 2002. One explanation for the continued Iranian immigration is found in a Columbia University study that states; "The majority of (study) participants believe that there is limited access to higher education in Iran and cite educational opportunity abroad as the most common reason for leaving Iran for the U.S. (Mossayeb & Shirazi, 2006).

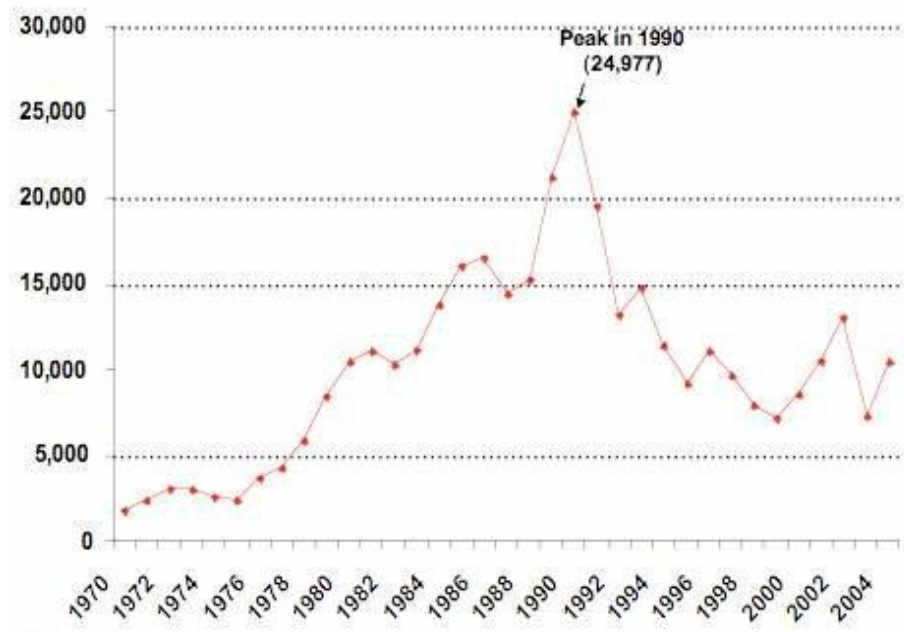


Figure 1: Iranian Immigration to the United States
 Source: *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 1970-2004*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics (as cited in Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006).

A List of Laws and Limitations to Iranian Immigration

- **The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act** (IIRIRA, 1996) created new grounds for

inadmissibility to, and removal from, the United States.

- **The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act** (PRWORA, 1996), undocumented immigrants are barred from any kind of public-benefit programs.
- **The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act** (AEDPA, 1996) expedited procedures for the removal of suspected foreign terrorists from the United States, allowed the detention and deportation of non-U.S. citizens on the basis of "secret evidence" that neither they nor their attorneys would be allowed to see, and instituted more stringent procedures for the granting of asylum.
- **USA Patriot Act of 2001 and Patriot Act II** (2003) provides for widespread government surveillance, wiretapping, detention and prosecution. It also states that the government is no longer required to disclose the identity of anyone detained in connection with a terror investigation, until criminal charges are filed, affectively allowing the government to hold someone indefinitely (sec 201). Furthermore, lawful immigrants would be stripped of the right to a fair deportation hearing and federal courts would not be allowed to review immigration rulings (secs. 503, 504).

- In 2002 a "special registration" system (NSEERS) and a "voluntary interview" program were instituted that singled out foreign-born Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians.
- **The Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002** implemented new procedures for the review of visa applicants.
- **The REAL ID Act of 2005** requires states to demand proof of citizenship or legal immigration status before issuing a driver's license.
- In his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush named Iran one of three countries as an "axis of evil" because of their involvement in terrorism and desire for weapons of mass destruction (Bush, 2002).
- Iran has been designated as a state that sponsors terrorism since January 19, 1984 ("State Sponsors of Terrorism") and as of 2007 the U.S. State Department has maintained that Iran was the "most active state sponsor of terrorism" (Chapter 3- State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview - Country Reports on Terrorism," 2007).
- **Title 8 of the United States Code** which encompasses all of the U.S. laws related to immigration (including the

above) and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1956. It has been said of this body of law that "America's immigration laws are some of the most complex and archaic provisions that can be found in the U.S. statutes. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA) rivals the tax code in the level of detail, confusion, and absurd consequences" (*Comprehensive Immigration Reform: A Primer*, 2009).

A Brief History of Iran

The earliest history of Iran dates back to 4000BC, with possibly its greatest time in history being that of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (530-330BC) and the "Great" kings of Cyrus II, Darius I, and Xerxes I. At its peak the empire was made up of 7.5 million square kilometers (2.9 square miles) ("Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia," 2005), ranking it the largest ancient empire by landmass in history ("List of largest empires," 2005), and at the time holding approximately one-fifth of the world's population (Strauss, 2004, p. 37). One amazing artifact to survive from the earliest days of the Achaemenid Persian Empire is the Cyrus cylinder, a cuneiform document issued by Cyrus the Great (Cyrus I), that is proclaimed to be the "first human rights charter in history" (MacGregor, 2005).

A key event in the history of Iran is the Islamic Conquest (633-651CE) of the Sassanid Persian Empire by the Rashidun Caliphate, which was formed directly after Muhammad's death in 632CE. After Iran was laid open by the defeat of the Sassanid army at Nahavand, and maybe in the spirit of Cyrus the Great, the Muslims offered some religious tolerance and fair treatment to those conquered by its army. However, with Muslim rule came a new state religion, Islam and later the harsher Shia Islam, which "imposed its own system of beliefs, laws, and social mores" ("Islamic conquest") on the people of Iran. Even with, or maybe in spite of Muslim rule, there has remained an Iranian identity that is distinctly Persian.

A final key event in the history of Iran and one linked to the Islamic Conquest is the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Before 1979, Iran was ruled by a series of dynastic kings, the last of which was the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) established by Reza (Khan) Shah. Reza Shah implemented ambitious plans to modernize Iran and he sent hundreds of Iranians to foreign schools, including his son. Reza Shah helped to transform Iran into a modern state. In the 1930s Reza Shah's dictatorial styled monarchy caused much dissatisfaction among the religious and intellectual elites (Ghasemi). During World War II both Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran because of Reza Shah's refusal to expel German nationals and to keep Iran's oil flowing for the

war effort. Reza Shah's political system was allowed to fail, with only a limited constitutional government allowed to remain. The Allies did allow Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the son of Reza Shah to succeed to his father's throne as King of Iran (Ghasemi).

Mohammad Reza Shah took his father's throne in 1941. Though he vowed to act as a constitutional monarchy, Mohammad Reza increasingly acted to expand his influence and take more control of the government. During the Cold War, the Shah made himself an ally of the West, while domestically he was a reformer. The Shah's reform policies peaked in 1963 with a program known as the White Revolution that included land reform, voting rights for women, and the elimination of illiteracy among other things ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi"). In 1967 Mohammad Reza crowned himself as King of Kings and Emperor of Iran. During his coronation, Mohammad Reza linked himself back to the ancient kings of Persia, and in particular Cyrus the Great by pointing to the Cyrus cylinder as a symbol for his own reformist but autocratic monarchy.

By the mid-1970s the relationship between the people of Iran, the religious and intellectual elites that had been marginalized by Reza Shah and then by his son Mohammad Reza Shah finally came to a breaking point. Islamic leaders, including an influential exiled cleric named Ayatollah Khomeini focused the

people's discontent and anger into an Islamic ideology calling for the overthrow of the Shah ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi"). With his country near to civil war in January of 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah left Iran. With the Shah gone, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1 and two months later in a national referendum declared an Islamic republic with a new constitution reflecting his personal ideals for an Islamic government and himself as supreme spiritual leader ("Islamic Revolution of 1979").

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the new government's crushing of any opposition to its rule, Islam was forced on the Iranian people as it was during the Islamic Conquest of the 5th century.

Iranian Culture

It has been said that "Iran's glory has always been its culture" (Frye, 2005, xi). Certainly this is easy to see with a nation and a culture being one of the oldest continuous civilizations in the history of world ("Culture of Iran"), dating back to 4000BC. Iran has a culture rich in language, literature, music, and art.

Persian is the official language of Iran and holds that status in two other countries as well. The language is regulated by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature in Iran, and

the Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan. The Persian language is classified as belonging to the Western group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family and its estimated number of native speakers is between 80 and 134 million persons ("Persian language"; "Persian language: Facts, Discussion Forum, and Encyclopedia Article"). Strongly related to its language is Iran's literature which is full of wonderful examples of poetry, both ancient and modern, and "Iranian poets have penned some of the most wonderful and moving poetry" in history (Culture of Iran").

"Iranians have one of the richest and most elaborate artistic traditions in the world" ("Culture of Iran"), yet that rich heritage in literature, art, and music has been severely censored by Islamic religious leaders. Iranians have become increasingly inventive when it comes to releasing art despite the many restrictions placed upon it by the Iranian regime.

Iran's Current Events

On June 12, 2009, Iran held its tenth presidential election since its establishment as an Islamic Republic in 1979. The day after the election, Iran's official news agency declared that the current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejah had won. The margin of victory was so wide that it caused suspicion among the Iranian people, and many took to the streets to protest. Many of

the protestors wore green, the party color for presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, while he called for peaceful nonviolent protests of the election results ("Iran News - Breaking World Iran News - The New York Times").

Almost since the very first hours of the protests, the protestors can be heard chanting, "we want freedom;" and it seems clear that Iranians of all ages are protesting more than just election fraud. The government has responded with force, using riot police, tear gas, batons, gun fire, and the feared paramilitary militia, the Basij and secret police. The government in an effort to hide its brutal use of force against its own people threw out the foreign media and banned media coverage. With their same inventiveness to get their art seen without censorship, however, the Iranian people have been their own media, getting stories, pictures, and video out of Iran for the whole world to see using social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Parr, 2009).

Protests continue in Iran and on July 25, Amnesty International and several other major human rights organizations have organized a Global Day of Action for Iran with rallies being held in 50 major cities all over the world ("Global Day of Action for Iran"). It is clear from the resolve of the Iranian people that they are protesting more than government corruption, or even the beatings, arrests, torture, and deaths they have

incurred at the hands of a ruthless government desperately trying to hold on to power. What we are witnessing in Iran is a second "revolution" (J. R., personal communication, 2009).

References

- Bush, G. W. (2002, January 29). *The President's State of the Union Address*. Address presented at The President's State of the Union Address in The United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. Retrieved July 19, 2009, from <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html>
- Chapter 3 - State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview - Country Reports on Terrorism. (2007, April 30). In *U.S. Department of State*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from <http://www.state.gov/>
- Comprehensive Immigration Reform: A Primer* (Issue brief). (2009, June 24). Retrieved July 19, 2009, from <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/CIR%20Primer%20-%20FINAL.pdf>.
- Culture of Iran. (n.d.). In *Everyculture.com*. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://www.everyculture.com>
- Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia. (2005). In *Iranheritage.org*. Retrieved July 18, 2009, from <http://www.iranheritage.org>
- Frye, R. N. (2005). *Greater Iran A 20th-century Odyssey*. New York, NY: Mazda.
- Ghasemi, S. (n.d.). Pahlavi Dynasty. In M. Denino (Ed.),

Iranchamber.com. Retrieved July 19, 2009, from
<http://www.iranchamber.com>

Global Day of Action for Iran. (n.d.). In *Amnesty International USA - Protect Human Rights*. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/all-countries/iran/global-day-of-action-for-iran/page.do?id=1011686>

Hakimzadeh, S., & Dixon, D. (2006, June). Iranian-Born Immigrants Admitted to the United States, 1970 to 2004 [Chart]. In *Migration Information Source - Spotlight on the Iranian Foreign Born*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/images/spot2june06.png>

Hakimzadeh, S., & Dixon, D. (2006, June). US in Focus: Spotlight on the Iranian Foreign Born. In *Migration Information Source - Spotlight on the Iranian Foreign Born*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Usfocus/display.cfm?ID=404#1>

Iran News - Breaking World Iran News - The New York Times. (n.d.). In *Times Topics*. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=Iran&st=cse>

Islamic conquest. (n.d.). In *Iranchamber.com*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from <http://www.iranchamber.com>

Islamic Revolution of 1979. (n.d.). In *Iranchamber.com*.

Retrieved July 19, 2009, from <http://www.iranchamber.com>
List of largest empires. (2005, December 28). In *Wikipedia.org*.
Retrieved July 18, 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org>
MacGregor, N. (2005). The whole world in our hands. In B. T.
Hoffman (Ed.), *Art and cultural heritage international and
national law, policy, and practice* (pp. 383-384).
Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. (n.d.). In *Iranchamber.com*.
Retrieved July 19, 2009, from <http://www.iranchamber.com>
Mossayeb, S. M., & Shirazi, R. (2006). Education and Emigration:
The case of the Iranian-American community. *Current Issues
in Comparative Education*, 9(1), 30-45.
Parr, B. (2009, June 14). HOW TO: Track Iran Election with
Twitter and Social Media. In *Social Media News and Web Tips
? Mashable ? The Social Media Guide*. Retrieved July 20,
2009, from <http://mashable.com/2009/06/14/new-media-iran/>
Parr, B. (2009, June 16). U.S. Government Asks Twitter to Stay
Up for #IranElection Crisis. In *Social Media News and Web
Tips ? Mashable ? The Social Media Guide*. Retrieved July
20, 2009, from <http://mashable.com/2009/06/16/twitter-iran/>
Persian language: Facts, Discussion Forum, and Encyclopedia
Article. (n.d.). In *AbsoluteAstronomy.com*. Retrieved July
20, 2009, from
http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Persian_language

Persian language. (2001, December 7). In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_language#cite_ref-0

R., J. (2009, January 19). Conversation with Jaleh R* [Personal interview]. *Note - full name not disclosed to protect Jaleh's family in Iran.

State Sponsors of Terrorism. (n.d.). In *U.S. Department of State*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from <http://www.state.gov/>

Strauss, B. (2004). *The Battle of Salamis*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.