
The Druze in the United States

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Abstract: *The first immigrants arrived in the United States with the aim of becoming rich. In 1907, a group of Druze immigrants to the United States set up the first brotherhood organization under the name "Al-Bachorat al-Durzia". They intended to preserve their religion, culture and Druze identity. In 1947, the younger generation of the Druze immigrants took over the leadership and expanded the operations of the organization. Second- and third-generation Druze Americans are often assimilated into American youth culture.*

Key Words: Druze immigration, the United States, American Druze Foundation

AT THE END OF the 19th century the Druze from Syria and Lebanon began migrating to the United States, and today this community has become the most important one among all the Druze communities in the diaspora. "The journey of the Druze in America is one filled with pride, hard work, and boundless dreams". ([American Druze Foundation, 2017](#))

The first immigrants arrived in the United States with the aim of becoming rich and returning to their native country under better conditions, but not all of them returned. The first Druze immigrants reached the shores of America at the end of the 19th century, and because of their rising numbers, the need arose for ties of friendship and support with each other. At the start of the 20th century, the flow of Druze immigrants to America increased.

"Many of the immigrants came and settled across the United States with a large concentration in Michigan; Seattle, Washington; and the North East. They were enduring spirits, hardworking individuals, loyal countrymen, and proud patriots". ([American Druze Foundation, 2017](#))

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The Druze who had migrated to America and were greatly in need of preserving their religion, culture and identity, encountered many difficulties at the beginning of their lives far from their homeland. Therefore, it was a growing necessity for them to keep united and organized (Salah, 1989).

The history of the Druze in American can be divided into three periods:

The first period: Establishment of the lives of the immigrants - from the beginning of the Druze migration until 1946

In 1907, a group of Druze immigrants to the United States set up the first brotherhood organization under the name "Al-Bachorat al-Durzia". On February 1, 1908, the first meeting of the organization was held in the city of Seattle. The organization served as a means for unity and a tool for collective organized planning. Its motto was "Truth in speech and brotherhood in action" (Our Heritage, 1982). Through this organization the Druze immigrants intended to preserve their religion, culture and Druze identity as well as to support the livelihood of their families in Lebanon and assist the Druze charity institutions in the motherland. The organization succeeded in setting up a united group of Druze families in the United States and drawing close and strengthening the relations between them. It supplied services to the members of the Druze community and contributed to the preservation of the principles of the Druze faith among the Druze immigrants.

The aims of the organization were determined at the 1908 meeting:

1. Offering assistance to every member who was in need of health services.
2. Setting up social meetings among the members of the organization.
3. Setting up libraries and furnishing them.
4. Promoting social and personal relations among the members of the organization.
5. Paying the expenses of illness for every member.

At the meeting held on October 15, 1946, it was decided to conduct annual meetings. At the 1946 meeting, the American Druze Society (ADS) was founded, through which the ties of friendship, brotherhood and close association among the Druze of the United States were reinforced. Throughout the years the members of the organization endeavoured to strengthen the relations between the Druze in all parts of the United States by organizing festivals in which the Druze families, especially the younger generation, could participant with the aim of maintaining close ties amongst them.

The second period: From 1947-1970, the 24th annual meeting

In 1947, the younger generation of the Druze immigrants, those born in the United States, took over the leadership and expanded the operations of the organization. From then onwards, the aim of the organization was not only to preserve the Druze religion, culture and identity, but also to provide a basis for the development and expansion at the national level. The American Druze Society (ADS) was then founded, and the new society had aims identical with the former one with a stress on the involvement of young Druze in the community.

As a result of the establishment of the new organization, a new tradition developed among the Druze immigrants of annual meetings during which internal matters were discussed, positions were consolidated for conduct towards factors outside the community with the aim of allowing young boys and girls of marriageable age to get to know one another. The organization was not formal, and adopted the name "American Druze Society". This society was strengthened, and internal laws were legislated in 1962 to arrange the various spheres of life within the community. In the course of time these laws were formed into a society under the name "American Druze Society".

The third period: From the 25th annual meeting in 1971 until today

At the 25th annual meeting, the silver jubilee of 1971, the "National ADS" was founded with the aim to unify all the branches of the society in the various cities of the United States under a single leadership (O.H. 1982).

In 1972, a group of scholars began to translate the principles of the Druze faith into English in order to bring the younger generation in the community which did not know Arabic closer to their religion. The society appointed Dr. Sami Makarem, a Lebanese of a religious family who had studied in the United States and was a professor at the American University in Beirut, to compose a book in English on the Druze faith. This book, published in 1974, was written with the permission of the Druze spiritual leader in Lebanon (Makarem 1974). Until today, this book is used as a means to preserve Druze identity among the immigrants in the United States.

The challenges that facing the Druze growing up in the United States, "religion isn't part of daily life. Second- and third-generation Druze Americans

are often assimilated into American youth culture, and many move further from the faith when they enter high school and college".(Liana Aghajanian 2015)

In 1989, a visionary and dedicated group of American Druze pioneers incorporated the American Druze Foundation. They saw what was not; they dreamt of what could be; and, their actions bore the fruit of their labour, forging a strong presence for the American Druze in the United States of America.

Today, the American Druze Foundation (ADF) is dedicated to the study, preservation, and enhancement of the Druze cultural heritage and the advancement of the understanding of the Druze in the American community. "The foundation's realized dream of placing the Druze in the best halls of American academia through partnership with established universities is just the beginning".(American Druze Foundation, 2017)

Conclusion

The initial organization of the first Druze immigrants to the United States led to the founding of the American Druze Society (ADS). The aims of this organization fulfilled the aims to which these first immigrants aspired to realize. The first aim was to preserve Druze identity in the West in widest sense, and to transmit traditional Druze pride from generation to generation, to maintain ties of friendship, and to preserve the unique Druze culture in order to avoid assimilation within Western society.

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