

Arab-American: What freedoms will be taken next?

I am an Arab-American. My father, Charles Azar, a respected member of the Orlando community before he died, emigrated from Syria, and like other early immigrants found and utilized unlimited opportunity living here. Orlando was a sleepy town then, and Dad risked building the first grocery store on U.S. Highway 17-92 back in the 1940s. 1215 N. Mills Ave. was my address growing up. I walked to Hillcrest grade school every day.

Later, Dad bought an orange grove. He delighted in the steady profits from his mounting real-estate endeavors. He was living the American dream. There was so much joy and gratitude in his heart that every customer who came into our store grew tired of hearing my father praise this land of dreams fulfilled.

It didn't matter who you were. Jew or Arab. Bounty was there for everyone.

Sept. 11 changed all that, especially for people like me. We are now watched with vigilant eyes, talked about from behind closed doors, even considered possible terrorists. It has become difficult for Arab-Americans to open

businesses, carry on enterprises without pressure from the media's prying eyes, politicians' fears and a wary public.

Friday morning's *Sentinel* left me glad that my father is not here to read what is happening to his people. The strong-armed routing of these Arab-American citizens from their home, and their subsequent arrests and incarceration without bail, is not the America that he or I had come to know. According to an eyewitness account, "They came in with more than 30 agents, heavily armed, and screaming and yelling."

I'm outraged.

Has our civility died? Have we lost the sense that we are Americans, that people are innocent until proven otherwise, that we, unlike other governments, treat suspected persons with some modicum of dignity? Are we condemned to repeat the notorious tactics of the swastika?

Charles Azar, I'm glad you didn't live to see this.

As for me, I am grieving the loss of more than what has happened this week. I am grieving the disappearance of our civil rights.

What freedoms will be taken next?

I want to bury my head in my smaller world where I live and pray that it doesn't happen to me.

My WORD

ADELE AZAR-RUCQUOI

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