

## **The Syrian and Lebanese American Federation: a Case for Connection, 1935-1948**

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The story of Lebanese emigration to the Americas is often told as a tale of rupture: the dislocations of global capitalism, the strife of 1860, and the flight of the country's rural poor into Beirut are said to have contributed to a global outflow of almost one-sixth of the region's population. Lebanese immigrants in the United States longed for connection to a homeland they felt increasingly distant from. This sense of distance deepened as Syria and Lebanon underwent a series of changes in the twentieth century's first half, transforming from Ottoman province to French protectorate and into two autonomous states. However, while Syrians and Lebanese abroad felt far away from home, they continually reasserted connections to it. Through both the press and philanthropic associations, those in the *mahjar* nourished ongoing cultural bonds spanning across the diaspora.

Based out of Boston, Massachusetts, the Syrian and Lebanese American Federation represented the pinnacle of this unifying project. This paper will examine the early work of the Federation through the lens of its connective aims. As the first attempt to unionize Levantine cultural associations across the United States, this organization embraced three projects: to serve as a cultural broker between Arab-American communities and Anglo-American society, to reconnect immigrant communities in the *mahjar* to one another and to the homeland in a meaningful way, and to educate Syrian and Lebanese American youth in the culture of their forefathers. All three initiatives embraced the language of unity, connection, and reclamation in order to achieve their goals. Looking at the Federation movement as an early diasporic institution seeking to reduce distance between world communities allows us to reconsider the Lebanese emigration model as a story that shows rupture and connection as two sides of one coin.