Consuming Orientalism: Public Foodways of Arab American Christians

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Abstract

For more than a century, Arab Americans have resorted to self-Orientalism to secure their place in the U.S. multicultural arena as “authentic” others. My essay focuses on the strategic use of self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric within Arab American Christian communities, specifically at restaurants and church-sponsored festivals. Following the long line of scholars that have mobilized and modified Edward Said’s framework, my use of the term self-Orientalism refers to the ways that Arab Americans have strategically deployed Orientalist imagery and rhetoric as a representational practice within liberal multiculturalism. My essay also intervenes in the field of Arab American studies in two key ways: by arguing for the importance of foodways as site of cultural analysis, and by focusing on how Arab Americans have themselves interacted with and deployed stereotypical representations.
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