

[STING]

DANA BALLOUT: In the summer of 2002 when Afnan was around 13 years old, her parents signed her up for a summer camp a few hours north of where they lived in Raleigh, North Carolina.

AFNAN: And we've been doing this forever. Like as far as I can remember, we've always done the summer camps. And this specific camp was going to be in West Virginia at Pipestem Resort state park. And we've been there many times. And so it's a beautiful place. It's up in the mountains. For us kids, we loved it. Because it was a chance like - a lot of times, it was the first time we get to be away from our parents. We would put up our own tents.

DANA BALLOUT: The camp was organised through her local mosque in Raleigh. And she told us, there was definitely a religious element to the camp - they'd pray five times a day together together. But mostly it was just like any other summer camp - a bunch of outdoor activities.

AFNAN: Like we did a lot of hiking, canoeing, kayaking, playing volleyball. It was just really fun. It was a fun way to like connect with nature and then connect with like your fellow American Muslim peers.

DANA BALLOUT: So she arrives with all of her friends, all her camping gear, in the middle of this beautiful countryside with no real towns around for miles. Just this one big lake, and miles of forest. And one of the first activities they had planned was to go canoeing.

AFNAN: So we went that afternoon and I remember we came back and I think we had just finished praying, like asr prayer or something like that. And we were getting ready to like, do some other activity. And like, no joke, like ten black SUVs come rolling up into our campsite. And I just remember all these white men come running out of these cars. And I just remember being terrified. Because I remember 9/11, and how much hate there was against Muslims. So my first thought was, oh my God, these are like - the KKK is coming to kill us. And I was terrified. And I remember all the little kids come running around me because, like we were helping with the little kids and stuff like that. And I remember the man in charge of the camp came running, and they just, they were just everywhere, like these white men were everywhere. And he told them like please calm down, we have children here and they had guns. And he was like, what's happening? Like, can you explain to us?

And so what happened was is that while we were canoeing, we dropped a volleyball in the water. And we forgot about it. Like, we didn't know that we had dropped it. And the people kayaking around us reported us to the FBI. So the FBI came and raided our camp, and accused us of trying to bomb the dam. I don't know why I'm so emotional, but it's just so

frustrating to see that how, like any small act you did was just automatically associated with terrorism.

DANA BALLOUT: Afnan told us that these FBI agents raided the camp, interrogated the camp leaders and tested the volleyball. In case you didn't catch that: they thought that volleyball might have been a bomb, that these kids were trying to bomb the dam.

AFNAN: And then once they were satisfied with what they said they kind of just left us alone and went about their business and left in their black SUVs. I'll never forget that day. I'll never forget that moment. Its something that will stick with me forever.

DANA BALLOUT: Afnan never went back to that campsite again. And that experience that she had as a 13 year old kid at summer camp, was being experienced in different ways by Arab Americans across the US in the months and years after 9/11.

Every American can tell you they can remember exactly where they were and what they were doing on 9/11/2001. For me, it was when I was in Lebanon in my village - on the roof of my friend's house actually, and I rushed home to watch the horrific scenes. I'll never forget that day. For Arab Americans, it became clear in the weeks and months and years after 9/11 that it would change the relationship they had their country - and their fellow citizens - forever.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING:

SPEAKER 1: I don't want the mosque here.

SPEAKER 2: Why don't you want the mosque?

SPEAKER 1: Because I don't want to go through the constitution because I know what the constitution says, but they are spitting in our face - the mosque people.

DANA BALLOUT: In the week after September 11, 645 incidents of bias and hate crimes were reported against Arabs and South Asians in the United States.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: This is not about peaceful Islamic people. This is about extremist groups that are going to be here.

AMANEY JAMAL: I mean it was horrendous, right? First of all, in the immediate days and weeks after 9/11, I mean, Muslims were just afraid to leave their homes.

DANA BALLOUT: Amaney Jamal is the co-editor of the book *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*.

AMANEY JAMAL: Because they feared retaliation, physical retaliation.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: Do you know how hard it is walking out in the street like this? Do you know how how hard it is going to work like this?

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: It's not even Islamophobia, it's beyond Islamophobia. It's hate of Muslims.

AMANEY JAMAL: Mosques were being vandalized, Islamic schools in the US had to be shut down because there was fears and concerns that children in the Islamic schools could not be protected because of just popular outrage.

GEORGE W. BUSH (ARCHIVAL RECORDING): I've been told that some fear to leave. Some don't want to go shopping for their families. Some don't want to go about their ordinary daily routines. Because by wearing cover they're afraid they'll be intimidated. That should not and that will not stand in America.

DANA BALLOUT: But it wasn't just the public outrage. Despite what the president said publicly, almost immediately after 9/11, the US government started a programme of mass surveillance against its own citizens of Arab and Muslim descent. Ordinary citizens all over the country like Afnan and my own brother Ramy for example, were interrogated, arrested or had their homes raided.

AMANEY JAMAL: So when 9/11 happened, it was much easier to say, okay, this is consequence of tolerating these uncivilized peoples in our societies. And hence it allowed for this massive response that has not been witnessed in terms of how citizens are treated in the West. Because they were Muslim, we could basically interrogate them, we could violate their civil and political liberties. We need to protect ourselves.

DANA BALLOUT: For a lot of people, this felt unprecedented. But it wasn't. Invasive - and even illegal - surveillance programmes against Arabs and Arab Americans have a long history in the US. A history that started decades before the attacks on September 11.

Almost 30 years earlier, the US Government created a surveillance program to spy on Arabs and Arab Americans in the US. Its code name was Operation Boulder. Under the programme, 13 federal agencies collected intelligence on more than 150,000 Arabs and Arab Americans. One of those Americans was a man named Abdeen Jabara.

ABDEEN JABARA: I found out that they had conducted this from '67 to 1975, and that they had distributed information to three foreign governments and 17 federal agencies when they didn't have one bit of evidence that I was violating any law.

DANA BALLOUT: So he took the US government to court. And in the process, revealed that they were illegally spying on their own citizens.

I'm Dana Ballout, and this is Kerning Cultures. Stories from the Middle East and North Africa, and the spaces in between.

[INTRO STING]

DANA BALLOUT: A quick note before we start: we using the terms Arab American and Muslim American interchangeably in some parts of this story, even though many Arabs in the US aren't Muslim and most Muslims in the US aren't Arab... this is just how the categories came to be conflated by US intelligence agencies.

Okay. Here's Suzanne Gaber, one of the producers of this story.

SUZANNE GABER: There are hundreds of stories tied up in Operation Boulder. Stories involving deportations, long detentions and heavy surveillance. But our story today is about this man, Abdeen Jabara.

ABDEEN JABARA: I am an attorney by profession, but am currently retired from that.

Today, he's is well known for his legal and social support of Arabs in the U.S. But growing up in a small town in the 40s and 50s, he didn't have much interest in his Arab roots.

SUZANNE GABER: So can you tell us a little bit about your childhood and how you grew up in the states?

ABDEEN JABARA: Yes, I can, because I think about it quite a bit. I had a very interesting and very essentially happy childhood.

SUZANNE GABER: His family had been in the US for more than three decades at this point, and so growing up in that small town in northern Michigan, he says he felt more American than anything else.

ABDEEN JABARA: It's a very bucolic area with lots of lakes and rivers and hills, and my father was in the grocery business in this small town and it was a very integrated community. The town was a kind of a self contained unit. It had its own newspaper, it had a bakery, and people rarely went to any other places because we didn't need it. We had it there.

SUZANNE GABER: The small town life suited Abdeen. He went to a small elementary school in town, and when he wasn't there, spent his time playing with his siblings and neighbors.

ABDEEN JABARA: My mother would never go to sleep until everybody was home that night. She'd fix us these huge meals of Arabic food, and we'd all climb in the back of this open truck that had a canopy on the top and head out to some lake or some park or something and have a picnic. We had such a loving family.

All of this rather idyllic situation changed very drastically when I was 10 years old as my father and I went to a neighboring city, actually a small city to get groceries for our store. And we were involved in an accident in which he was killed and I was quite badly injured.

And it took me several months before I recovered from that injury, after which I began working in his store and I continued working in it. But during that time I was finishing school, I think partly because of the loss of my father and not really having had an opportunity to fully grieve his passing, I became much more intensely involved in his very strong attachment to his ethnic background.

SUZANNE GABER: Abdeen started trying to learn everything he could about his father's Lebanese heritage, and became more interested in issues facing the Arab community.

ABDEEN JABARA: And in high school I got involved in forensics competitions.

SUZANNE GABER: Which were kind of like speech and debate competitions.

ABDEEN JABARA: And I wrote an original essay that I used in this competition about the Palestine problem. That was my first introduction to it.

SUZANNE GABER: He also started learning Arabic, which he hadn't spoken a lot of growing up.

ABDEEN JABARA: After which I thought I should go to the Middle East and maybe I could improve my spoken Arabic, and I went to Egypt.

SUZANNE GABER: He spent six months in Egypt and then traveled to Lebanon - first to Beirut, then to his parents' villages in the Bekaa Valley.

ABDEEN JABARA: And met relatives there, including the uncle after whom I was named, who was 107 years old when I saw him. And it was quite an experience. And I traveled from there to Damascus and Aleppo, where I caught the train - the Orient Express.

DANA BALLOUT: The Orient Express took him as far as London. And from there, he traveled back to the US and finished up at law school. But when that was done he went straight back to live and work and in Beirut, where he got a job at the Palestine Information Office.

This was the 1960's, so Beirut's heyday, and he quickly surrounded himself with a group of Arab intellectuals, journalists and activists. One of them was Anan Ameri, a young journalist just starting her career.

ANAN AMERI: I was living in Beirut, Lebanon and working with the Palestine research center, and I had a side job as a freelance journalist.

SUZANNE GABER: One of her editors at the time gave her an assignment to interview Abdeen for an article.

ANAN AMERI: And he sounded interesting so I wanted to do an interview with him. And he asked me out to dinner and then another dinner. And then a week later we decided - I was going to go to France - and we decided we'd meet there. And then one thing led to another, I ended up coming to the States to visit him and we ended up marrying. Came here in July and we got married in November. Very fast.

SUZANNE GABER: But in the mid-60s, as Abdeen's work in Beirut started to dry up, he decided it was time to move back to the US and start his own law practice.

ABDEEN JABARA: And then shortly after I opened it, the war in the Middle East, the 1967 war happened.

ARCHIVE: Israeli forces drive spearheads across the Sinai Peninsula, west to the Suez Canal, south to the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, breaking the blockade, capturing the West Bank of the Jordan river, and occupying the old city of Jerusalem.

ABDEEN JABARA: All these things came kind of crashing down. And I was just totally in a state of shock, because I had just been there. I just lived in Lebanon and had traveled in Syria and in Palestine. And that war was a huge psychological blow and it kind of reminded me of the way that I experienced my father's death. That same kind of sense of loss.

SUZANNE GABER: At this point, Adeen wasn't sure what exactly he could do to help. So he began speaking with other people in the Arab American community in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

ABDEEN JABARA: And they all said, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? And someone suggested, well, we need to create an organization that will help get out accurate information about the Arabs and about the Palestinians because the American people don't know.

SUZANNE GABER: The group that came together in those days eventually became the Association of Arab American University Graduates. It was one of the first national Arab American groups, and they began hosting annual conferences - bringing scholars like Edward Said to talk about imperialism in the Middle East.

ABDEEN JABARA: But the main focus was on this new nascent resistance to Israel that was embodied in the Palestine Liberation Organization. That was ultimately what got me in trouble with the US intelligence agencies.

DANA BALLOUT: Around this time, the US government had started surveilling Abdeen. They were secretly recording the speeches he gave at those annual conferences, tracking his social activities and tapping his phone. But it wasn't just him. This was part of a much broader intelligence program called COINTELPRO. Under it, the FBI were already monitoring and harassing Black activists and Leftist groups.

FRED HAMPTON (ARCHIVAL RECORDING): Socialism is the people. If you're afraid of socialism, you're afraid of yourself.

DANA BALLOUT: Groups like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords and the American Indian Movement. They saw them as pro-communist, anti-American.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (ARCHIVAL RECORDING): The Communist Party of America is doing everything in its power to steal the minds and the souls and the hearts of our young people.

DANA BALLOUT: This was the 1950s and 60s; the darkest days of the Vietnam war. The Cold War loomed in the background of almost every American's psyche. The civil rights movement was taking off, and the US government was in a state of panic.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: Tragically, our nation's leadership - while striving for peace - has adopted a course that makes real peace unlikely.

DANA BALLOUT: And they reacted by coming down hard on any dissenting group who they felt were a threat. Their methods were often illegal: assassination, spinning false narratives, arbitrary detainment. In 1969, they helped orchestrate the murder of Black Panther Party's Chairman Fred Hampton. So in this context, in the early 1970s, the FBI officially added, quote "potential Arab saboteurs" to the list of groups that they saw as a threat. And then...

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: This is an ITN newsflash from the Olympic village in Munich, where earlier this morning armed Palestinian guerillas raided the sleeping quarters of the Israeli team.

DANA BALLOUT: The Black September attacks happened at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: The gunmen shot dead two Israelis and are now holding twenty athletes and six officials as hostages.

SUZANNE GABER: And this is where Operation Boulder starts. After the Black September attacks, the Nixon administration ordered the creation of the programme. In the words of one of its directors, it was set up to quote "check records and help establish the identity and immigration status of any Arab or other suspicious person." Basically, it was trying to

drive a wedge between less politically engaged Arab Americans and those with what the FBI saw as more radical, pro-Palestine politics.

DANA BALLOUT: Unlike some of the earlier intelligence gathering after the 1967 war for example, Operation Boulder wasn't secretive. The US government put out press releases in newspapers, which were written up in places like the New York Times and Newsweek. Headlines read things like, "US Checks Arabs to Block Terror" or "US Begins Screening Arab Residents and Travelers for Terrorists".

SUZANNE GABER: But for a lot of Arab Americans living through this period, Operation Boulder meant early morning home visits from the FBI, being questioned and interrogated on your college campus, having your private phone calls tapped, threats of deportations, visa denials, or any combination of the above.

ABDEEN JABARA: Every Arabic surname person, regardless of their nationality, had to be cleared by the intelligence service in the United States before they could get a visa to come to the United States. Every single one.

SUZANNE GABER: Can you talk a little bit about, like, when you first found out that the government was surveilling you?

ABDEEN JABARA: Well, we had a law firm in Detroit. We bought a house outside of the downtown area. The law firm, the building was broken into. And I got some calls that were black bag calls. And I was sure that it was the FBI.

DANA BALLOUT: 'Black bag call' is a kind of spy slang to describe tactics like breaking and entering, or electronic surveillance.

ABDEEN JABARA: And then the other thing that happened, and I think I told you think over the phone was, one of my partners went to the bank and somebody that was working there called him over and showed him this list of names on this paper, that were two or three Palestinian organizations and three or four individuals. And my name was on it.

SUZANNE GABER: When he asked around, nobody could tell Abdeen why his name had shown up on this list. But he knew that this was a move right out of the FBI's playbook - to keep tabs on the bank accounts of the people they were spying on. So as a lawyer, his first instinct was to take legal action to figure out what was going on.

ABDEEN JABARA: We knew we weren't violating any laws. We knew that we were doing what America says that we're entitled to do, which is to engage in political activity, to petition for change.

ANAN AMERI: I remember like he was very, very angry that the FBI would have the audacity to check his bank account. And he was determined to sue them.

DANA BALLOUT: This is Anan Ameri again. She was married to Abdeen at the time.

ANA AMERI: So when he came home he said, oh honey, you don't know what happened today - these bastards. I will get even with these bastards, if they're going to look at my bank account, I'm going to sue them. He's that kind of a person.

DANA BALLOUT: So Abdeen called the American Civil Liberties Union, better known as the ACLU, asking for help. And his case was assigned to a counterterrorism lawyer in Washington DC.

JOHN SHATTUCK: John Shattuck. I'm an attorney and for 13 years I was an attorney at the American civil liberties union in the 1970s and early 1980s, during which time I represented Abdeen Jabara.

DANA BALLOUT: With John Shattuck and the ACLU, Abdeen put a case together, to find out the scope and depth of this surveillance.

JOHN SHATTUCK: So we pieced together some information and in 1973 we filed the lawsuit against the FBI. And then we added to that the NSA and other agencies who were involved in this surveillance.

DANA BALLOUT: Eventually, that lawsuit led to the discovery of much of the information that we know about Operation Boulder today.

JOHN SHATTUCK: I think within the first four or five months - I have a figure here - I think something like 13 or 14,000 people had been investigated and then within the next year or so, sort of by the middle of 1974 or 75, probably over a hundred thousand people, including Arab Americans - not just visitors to the United States, but American citizens who were living here and then fully authorized to be here and fully engaged in life of being an American were captured by this surveillance.

ABDEEN JABARA: So what does that tell you? What does that tell you about this vaunted democracy of ours that wants to say to the world how it stands for individual rights? The fact of the matter is that, when they feel threatened in any way, those rights go down the tube.

DANA BALLOUT: In an affidavit, Abdeen said neighbors even started to notice people snooping around his house. Once, after his phone stopped working, a telephone repairman came out to inspect the lines near his house and noticed that they had actually been cut. Abdeen said a neighbor later told him that they'd seen men in suits in the back of his house

right around the time the phone lines went out. It's creepy. One of the other things they found in the case is that some of the information had come directly from groups whose goals countered Abdeen's.

JOHN SHATTUCK: One of the major sources of information about Jabara which led to the targeting of his case, in the Operation Boulder was a set of Zionist sources, as the judge says, I mean, I'll very specifically quote from his opinion, we have it right here - he says: "included in the information regarding Jabara throughout, is data which the FBI has received from Zionist sources."

SUZANNE GABER: One of those sources was the Jewish Defense League. Essentially what that means is: this private organization was gathering information about other American citizens and sharing it with US intelligence and police departments.

ABDEEN JABARA: And they had hired private investigators who went out and gathered information at speaking events, et cetera, and also got involved with various police departments around the United States to help gather information.

SUZANNE GABER: How did that feel learning that?

ABDEEN JABARA: I'll tell you very honestly, I mean, you know, of course it's both intimidating and a little bit kind of empowering in the sense that they think that you're doing something that really is making an impact, you know?

SUZANNE GABER: But it was taking a toll on his family. It was one thing to know that their phones were being tapped, but then a lot of weird stuff started happening to them. They started to notice people following them. And then, somebody - and they don't know who - broke into their home.

ANAN AMERI: One thing that was very unsettling to me is, like a year and a half after we were married, somebody broke into our house and it looked like a robbery. And I told Abdeen, and I don't want to stay home. I'm very, very nervous.

DANA BALLOUT: Anan began avoiding the house entirely. She was studying English at a nearby university, and would wait for Abdeen at the college library until he was done with his own classes so they could head back together and she wouldn't be alone.

ANAN AMERI: I said, drop me at the library and when you're ready to go home, I'm not staying home by myself.

SUZANNE GABER: Up until now, this all sounds like vignettes from a bad spy movie. The men in suits, the tapped telephone calls. But then, in March 1976...

ANAN AMERI: Our neighbor called and he said your house is on fire. Initially we thought it was just kids in the neighborhood. And then rumors started among the community, 'oh, it must be because of her political activism'. And that's really scary. That's when I got scared.

DANA BALLOUT: They never got to the bottom of what caused the fire. There's no evidence that it was the FBI or other intelligence agencies who were spying on them at the time. But still. Their house burnt down. Over the next few months though they rebuilt it, and then they sold it as fast as they could.

ANAN AMERI: And it took me a while to feel comfortable in our new house, but I never said to him, don't do this anymore. Ever, ever. I was very proud of him. But I didn't want to die in a fire either.

SUZANNE GABER: Which is very fair.

SUZANNE GABER: In 1979, after 6 years of pre-trial evidence gathering, there was a decision by the trial court judge that Abdeen's first amendment rights had been violated, and the FBI had to present greater evidence of how and why he was surveilled. Abdeen had won... sort of.

JOHN SHATTUCK: And then that went to the court of appeals and the court of appeals reversed the trial judge's decision and said two things really. First, it affirmed that this was indeed an intelligence investigation and that there was no evidence of criminal conduct and that this was really just intelligence gathering. But it basically said that an intelligence investigation of this kind was probably constitutional.

DANA BALLOUT: Despite the U-turn, the appeals court decision had a big impact on Abdeen's case and Operation Boulder. It also had an impact on how this kind of intelligence gathering in the future. The order still held that the FBI should stop investigating Abdeen and that records that they'd gathered on him should be destroyed. But it also established the idea that when governments are spying on people, they can't just cast a wide net and see what turns up. Intelligence gathering had to be more focussed.

JOHN SHATTUCK: And, second, that in general some kind of a warrant procedure or a court order should be necessary in order to make this kind of surveillance constitutional. And that in fact is what led to what's known as the foreign intelligence surveillance act, which was a federal statute enacted in the late 1970s, and you know, today remains kind of the standard against which these kinds of surveillance activities are judged.

SUZANNE GABER: We can't say for sure how much Abdeen's case influenced this - but in 1975, while the case was still ongoing, the entire Operation Boulder program was officially shut down. They said, because it involved too much paperwork.

DANA BALLOUT: After the break: how surveillance of Arab Americans continued, long after Operation Boulder was shut down. We'll be right back.

[MIDROLL]

DANA BALLOUT: When we left off, the US government had just officially shut down Operation Boulder. And although the program had ended, this kind of surveillance against Arabs and Arab American communities did not stop.

ABDEEN JABARA: Well, let me tell ya - it lessened. All right? I mean, you know, it never really stops, but it lessened.

SUZANNE GABER: In the years after Operation Boulder, there were lots more incidents of government surveillance of Arab and Arab American communities. They just went under different codenames. In the 1990s, there was Operation Vulgar Betrayal, in which US agencies used similar tactics: intimidation, home visits and electronic surveillance to harass the Arab and Muslim community in Chicago.

DANA BALLOUT: And then of course, after 9/11, everything changed.

JOHN SHATTUCK: Well, I think the Operation Boulder was in fact something of a blueprint for what was put in place after 9/11.

NICOLE NGUYEN: So for me, Operation Boulder is one point in a much larger story that you know, starts well before Operation Boulder and continues well after Operation Boulder began.

SUZANNE GABER: This is Associate Professor Nicole Nguyen, who studies the relationship between national security, war, and education at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

NICOLE NGUYEN: The 1970s, I think is important in Operation Boulder in particular, because it's sort of the consolidation of anti-immigrant, anti-activist, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim policies and sentiment. But I think there's a lot of key features around Operation Boulder, both in terms of trying to regulate immigration and construct this sort of perceived external threat - Arab threat - to the United States and the criminalizing practices happening within the United States in sort of every iteration since Operation Boulder.

AMANEY JAMAL: You had the architecture of surveillance and identifying people based on nothing else but their identity, and treat them as basically guilty.

SUZANNE GABER: Again, this is Amaney Jamal, who we heard at the top of the episode.

AMANEY JAMAL: Even if criminals are guilty in the US, they still have rights. But with these surveillance projects that start with Operation Boulder and throughout, not only are Muslims and Arabs treated as guilty, but basically guilty to the extent that they're not worthy of the civil and political protections that are ingrained in the constitution.

SUZANNE GABER: The kind of overt racial and religious profiling that happened after 9/11 was criticized by Arab and Muslim communities as well as groups like the ACLU. Because of that, some of the fundamental aspects of this type of surveillance began to change. For instance, instead of having agents on the ground following people, listening in on phone conversations like they did with Abdeen in the 1970s - these days, informants would pose as community leaders - Imans, for example - and report back to the FBI.

NICOLE NGUYEN: Now, it's not just the law enforcement who is out to police you to monitor you, to gather intelligence on you. It's also your teachers, your librarian, your therapist, your social worker, right? Everyone now becomes a potential node and this larger national security apparatus. Where, you know, people will report; I don't want to go to my therapist because I'm afraid they're going to report me to law enforcement, right? I'm afraid of what's going to happen to those notes. I'm afraid to check out books from the library. I'm afraid to say anything political in the classroom, right? So you start to erode the spaces that are supposed to give care to communities as they become these sites of surveillance.

SUZANNE GABER: But its undeniable that some of the fundamental patterns that began with Operation Boulder are still around.

NICOLE NGUYEN: Yeah, I guess there are a few really clear through lines. You know, the first is that Arab and Muslim immigrants in particular, but Arab American and Muslim Americans as well pose a national security threat to the United States that demands a sophisticated response. That includes surveillance that includes criminalization, that includes policing.

I think a second through line would be that Arab and Muslim political organizing, whether domestic in Palestine and elsewhere is also a threat to the United States. And that needs to be monitored surveyed and repressed, ultimately. And so, you know, part of what Operation Boulder was about was about sowing discord within Arab and Muslim communities, it was about fracturing communities.

SUZANNE GABER: And while US government surveillance of Arab and Muslim Americans continues - if Abdeen hadn't sued the US government, we might have never known the extent of its discrimination against his community.

JOHN SHATTUCK: So in a sense, I think he really - he's a hero of civil liberties in some ways. And I salute him for that and I was very happy to represent him in that.

DANA BALLOUT: Abdeen has continued to work against anti-Arab and Muslim bias by the US government. Him and Anan ended up getting a divorce and have both since remarried - but they're still very close. He lives in New York City now, and continues to mentor young Arab activists. One thing he said that stuck with us is that, when he looks back on his work, he often wonders, what would my father think?

ABDEEN JABARA: You know, when I think back at him and, and I just wonder what he would say about me today. You know, I'm not sure, I'm not sure because - he would think maybe I was maybe getting in too much trouble. And that I shouldn't. But I don't know. I really don't know.

WILL THOMSON: We came across a poem you had written about your father. Would you mind reading that for us?

ABDEEN JABARA: Well, do you have it there? I think I remember it all, but it's the best poem I've ever written.

WILL THOMSON: It's beautiful.

ABDEEN JABARA: Father. I know you came out of a long mountain, wide-thumbed. Brimming with mustache, your shoulders stuck in a tight cold. Pieces of bread in your pocket. You left like others in the Ottoman time, excited in a small boat. Behind you, a village of consequence, centuries of appointed stick in the earth, and the face of an old woman, your mother, crying softly in a bad winter.

DANA BALLOUT: This episode was produced by Suzanne Gaber and Will Thomson and edited by me, Dana Ballout and Alex Atack. Fact checking by Deena Sabry. Additional support from Nadeen Shaker and Zeina Dowidar. Sound design and mixing by Paul Alouf.

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We'll be back with a new episode next week. Thanks for listening. Take care, stay safe.

[OUTRO STING]