

Title: Chicago
Author: Alaa Al Aswany
Publisher: Harper Perennial
Copyright: 2007
ISBN: 978-0-0072-8624-9
Format: Paperback
Genre: Novel
Part of Series: No

In a professional field that demands hard work, any group of people could find themselves questioning their life after the rigorous, day-to-day requirements. Now, add in that you are an immigrant in the United States for the first time. In *Chicago* (2007), Alaa Al Aswany focuses on a variety of emotional topics to describe just how tough the transition can be for a group of foreigners. Specifically, a group of Egyptian-American doctors find themselves fighting inner demons while adjusting to the culture change that comes along with living in the United States for the first time.

The novel follows several Egyptian-Americans who are students and professors at the University of Illinois-Chicago Medical School. There is a compilation of stories of their experience in the city of Chicago, the school, to demonstrate how much racism and discrimination they truly fight day in and day out. Even in Chicago, the “Golden City” of the Midwest, the group of Arab students still struggle with overcoming societal change. Aswany highlights several characters, including student Shaymaa Muhhammadi and her lover, Dr. Raafat Thabet. However, Thabet refuses to marry her because of the strong religious standard in his family history. This is an example of battling an internal factor, their Muslim faith. It uses descriptive imagery to illustrate the challenges Egyptians face in modern America. The novel touches on several serious issues, such as faith, sexual assault, relationship trouble, and the inner demons people fight on a daily basis. For the Egyptians who mostly come from devout Muslim families, they find it very tough to ignore the temptations that life in America brings. The sexual life and conflicts of each character could be described too vividly at times. For example, at the end of Chapter 1, in one of her first nights in America, Shaymaa has to fight off a sexual assault. Aswany does not hesitate getting straight to the point, and does not shy away from the dark sides of life as an American immigrant. In conclusion, *Chicago* paints a picture of the inner conflicts that occur with the Egyptian-American population in a post 9/11 American society.

Reviewed by Charleston Bowles.