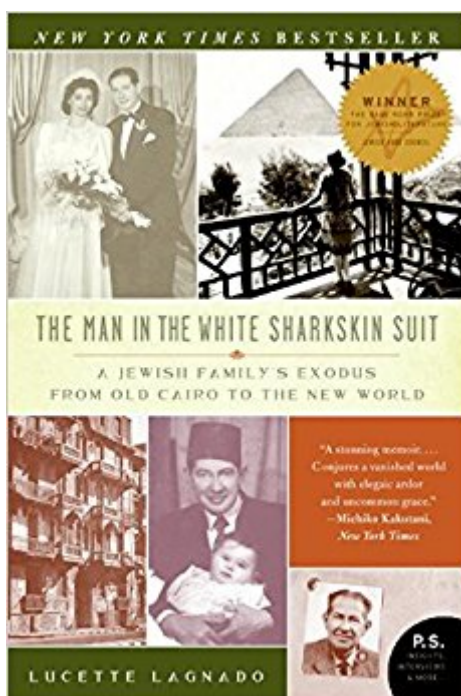


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# The Man In The White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus From Old Cairo To The New World (P.S.)



## Synopsis

Lucette Lagnado's father, Leon, is a successful Egyptian businessman and boulevardier who, dressed in his signature white sharkskin suit, makes deals and trades at Shepherd's Hotel and at the dark bar of the Nile Hilton. After the fall of King Farouk and the rise of the Nasser dictatorship, Leon loses everything and his family is forced to flee, abandoning a life once marked by beauty and luxury to plunge into hardship and poverty, as they take flight for any country that would have them. A vivid, heartbreaking, and powerful inversion of the American dream, Lucette Lagnado's unforgettable memoir is a sweeping story of family, faith, tradition, tragedy, and triumph set against the stunning backdrop of Cairo, Paris, and New York. Winner of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature and hailed by the New York Times Book Review as a "brilliant, crushing book" and the New Yorker as a memoir of ruin "told without melodrama by its youngest survivor," *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* recounts the exile of the author's Jewish Egyptian family from Cairo in 1963 and her father's heroic and tragic struggle to survive his "riches to rags" trajectory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This memoir of an Egyptian Jewish family's gradual ruin is told without melodrama by its youngest survivor, now a reporter at the Wall Street Journal. Lagnado's story hinges on her father, "the Captain," who cut a dashing figure in mid-century Cairo, consorting with British officers and Egyptian royalty at French caf  s while his family, neglected, stayed home. At first refusing to join the tide of Jews fleeing Egypt under the Nasser regime, the Captain finally yields, in 1963, when

the family escapes to Paris and then Brooklyn. Deprived of wealth, status, and any means of coping, Lagnado's father fades, but he never loses his air of chivalry, manifested in a regular outflow of tiny checks to charitable causes; orphanages, vocational schools, and dowry funds for poor girls; overseas. "As if the Captain were capable of rescuing anyone," his daughter writes. Copyright © 2007 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker

**\*Starred Review\*** Lagnado's captivating account of her family's life in cosmopolitan Cairo and painful relocation to America centers on her beloved father. Dashing man-about-town Leon Lagnado, who kept to his carousing ways even after marrying a beautiful woman 22 years his junior, was enraptured at the age of 55 by the author, his fourth child; affectionately called Loulou, she became her father's companion, even at temple services and the Nile Hilton bar. But the Suez war in 1956 and the Nasser regime's cultural holocaust began forcing Jews from their native Egypt. Leon's injury in a fall and Loulou's mysterious illness (first diagnosed as cat scratch fever, eventually found to be something far worse) delayed the Lagnados' departure until 1963, when they arrived in New York with \$212, the maximum they were allowed to take out of Egypt; and Leon, once a prosperous, independent businessman and investor, was reduced to selling ties on the street. In Lagnado's accomplished hands, this personal account illuminates its places and times, providing indelible individual portraits and illustrating the difficulty of assimilation. An exceptional memoir. Leber, Michele Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Excellent description of middle class life in Cairo, Egypt, prior to, and after the revolution which ousted the King and replaced him with a Military Junta, that eventually turned on the middle class and especially the Jews. This is the story of a Jewish family, and especially the rather flamboyant father, who, while fervently religious, identifies as an Egyptian (speaking perfect Arabic), and has all the trappings of Egyptian middle class culture. Then the revolution occurs (1952). Not much changes until the Suez war with Israel (and England and France, 1956). The Jews of Egypt are forced to emigrate in droves (though never physically threatened). The book follows the family's heart wrenching departure, then their tribulations as they seek asylum in the US. Finally as they settle in New York, the book vividly describes the culture shock experienced by the older generation and the far easier adaptation of the teenagers. The author, who is the youngest child of this family, writes with sensitivity and an easy to read style.

One of the best books I have ever read. Thoroughly enjoyable! Highly recommend it! It's a

fascinating story of her Egyptian Jewish family's exodus from Egypt, and other Egyptian Jews, after Egypt ceased to be a British colony and gained its independence in 1952. The book is interesting on so many levels. Historically, it describes what Cairo was like in the 1940's and 50's, what it was like during World War 2, and briefly touches on why and how Hitler and Mussolini lost the battlefront of North Africa to the Allied forces. It also has thoughtful, keen observations on cultural distinctives of the East and the West, and through the story you get a picture of the cultural adjustments that immigrants from the East face and make when they move to the West. It also paints a picture of what it is like to be parent from the East, raising kids in the West, and what it's like to be a child in the West, growing up with parents who are immigrants from the East. My Egyptian friends will particularly like it, but also, like *Fiddler on the Roof*, the story has a broad appeal beyond its immediate context, and many can relate to it. It is so eloquently written, that reading paragraph after paragraph, is like listening to a beautifully composed piece of music. If you love a good book you'll love this one!

I found this book to be informative as I learned about a culture, the Levantine Jews, which I knew nothing about. It is biographical, following the lives of the Lagnado family from the 1950's to present as they regressed from a privileged life in Egypt to poverty as immigrants in America. The writing style got a bit stale midway through the book. The author's father was the primary focus and was idolized. The book would have been more interesting had the author focused on other family members as well.

Important. Interesting. Well told. First we learn that the "man in the White Sharkskin suit" takes his Aleppo Syrian Jewish tradition to cosmopolitan Cairo which he adopted as his dream town. Life there with his family is good. His ways of life are tolerated. Secondly we learnt how hard it was to get to the United States, when after world War II Jews were undesirable in Egypt. It was an almost year long, arduous and degrading process till he and his family received the immigration permits in Paris. Then: the Welcome in the NEW World was limited and short lived. Like the majority of immigrants with no help from already adapted families, the gentleman from Cairo sought refuge in a Jewish neighborhood where he could find the food he was used to, even the ground floor apartment and the temple needed according to his Aleppo Jewish version. Like many, he and his wife remained immigrants while his sons and worse his oldest daughter moved out. Lesson: only the second generations merge, and like the youngest daughter, who told us this fascinating story of many, but, in this case, highly individual story, succeed. She became an American. But going back to Cairo,

where she wanted to revisit the dream city of her beloved father, she did not find it. It had changed.

Such a well-written story. I learned a lot about the Jewish culture in the early 1900s. The descriptions of early Cairo were amazing. I felt like I was there. I've been to Cairo and could tell that at one time, it was a magical place. Reading about their transition in to America was very interesting. Such a struggle for young people to embrace both worlds: the new while maintaining traditions of the old. Delighted to have read this story.

The book gave me an insider's view of immigration and its challenges for families. I didn't know much about Cairo pre Nasser, and I really enjoyed getting this perspective on the area. The family forced to immigrate was wealthy and lived a life of privilege in Egypt, but more importantly, the reader gets a glimpse of how it is to live with close family ties and ancient traditions as well. Their rough transition to America was not necessarily their much lower standard of living but the loss of family (nuclear and extended) and the traditions that bind them to a larger community. When I read about or hear about this area on the news, I can picture more than war and terrorists; I can see families and culture.

I loved this book! I can relate so well to the close relationship the author had with her father. I was the youngest in my family and the only daughter. I was also a daddy's girl. I learned a lot historically, never realizing that Egypt had a large Jewish population and that Cairo was such a vibrantly modern city. Her grandmothers were a joy to read about. My grandparents came here from Italy and loved to cook for the family like hers did. It was heartbreaking that the family had to leave their homeland as well off financially people and to come to America and struggle for the rest of their lives. At least the children did well as adults. I couldn't put this book down..it's well worth reading.

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