

10-1-1991

## Albert Mokhiber's War Against Hate

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum)

---

### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1991) "Albert Mokhiber's War Against Hate," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 5.  
Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol6/iss1/5](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol6/iss1/5)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

# Albert Mokhiber's War Against Hate

**D**uring the Persian Gulf war, anti-Arab sentiment in the United States reached disturbing proportions. From ethnic slurs and spray-painted graffiti to outright violence against Arab-Americans, the new patriotism sometimes showed its ugly side.

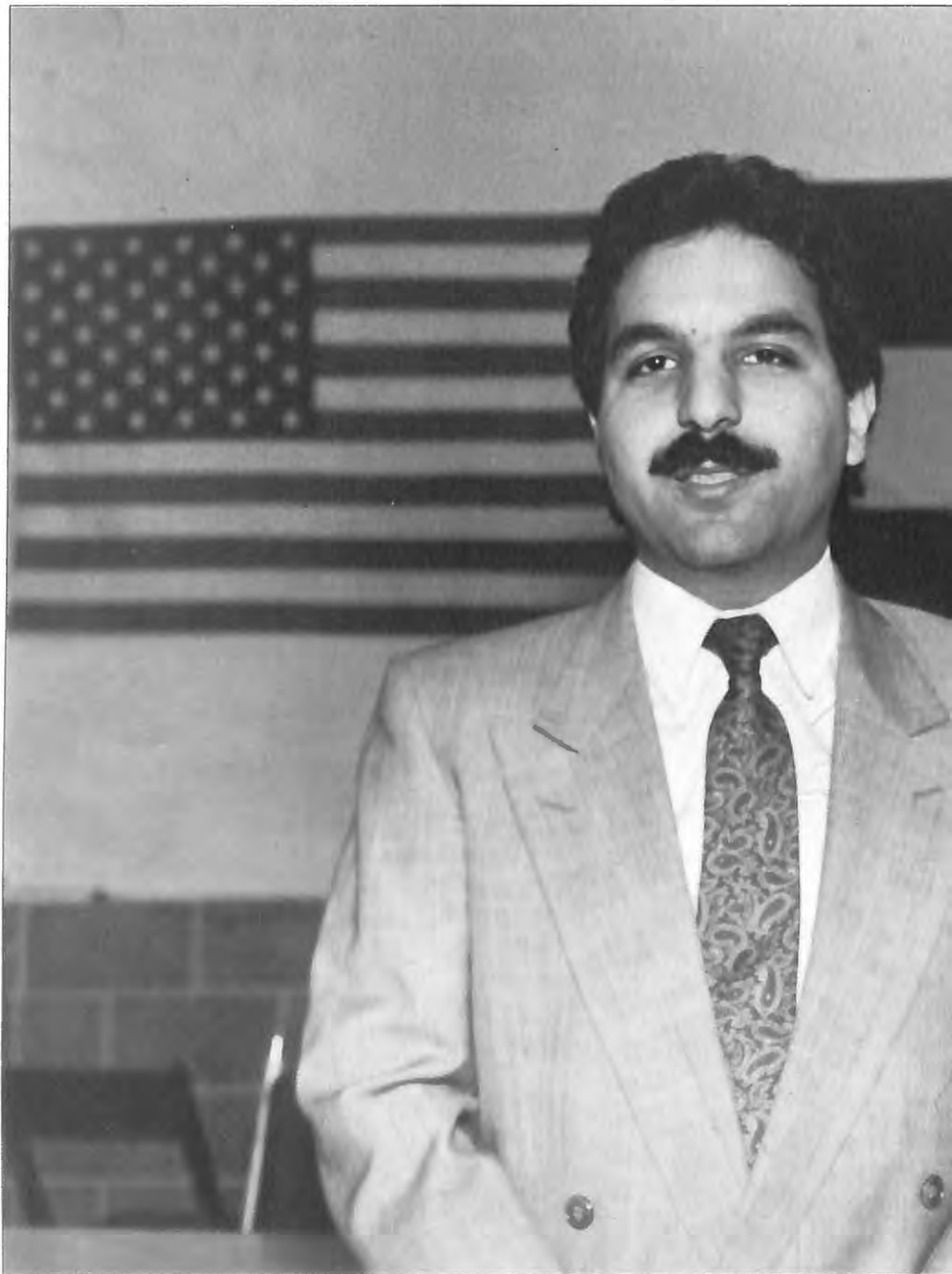
It was a busy time for Albert P. Mokhiber, Class of 1983. As president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Mokhiber has been besieged by reports of such prejudice — and charged with the task of deflecting them.

Mokhiber, 32, took office in September — a month after Saddam Hussein's tanks rolled into Kuwait and precipitated the worst Mideast crisis in decades.

"There's always the danger that Arab-Americans will become domestic casualties," Mokhiber said. Even after the war's end, the stereotypes persist: "People point at us and say, 'They're all terrorists, they're all oil barons, they all have 40 wives,' and nobody really cares."

The ADC is the nation's largest Arab civil rights group, with 25,000 members and a 22-person staff.

Its efforts range from public relations to legal advocacy. Mokhiber led the ADC to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *St. Francis College v. Al-Khazraji* — and was cheered by the court's unanimous decision that Arabs were entitled to protection under U.S. civil rights



UB LAW

FORUM

Fall 1991



statutes.

"Anti-Arab bias is not an indictment against American society," Mokhiber said in a prominent February profile in *People* magazine. "There are nuts and crazies in every country."

Growing up in a melting-pot neighborhood of Niagara Falls, N.Y., Mokhiber experienced little prejudice. His parents were born in the United States, and he and his three older siblings were fully Americanized. At home, Mokhiber's parents taught the children respect for the heritage of their immigrant Lebanese Christian grandparents. Visits by relatives from Lebanon kept him interested in Arab issues, including that country's civil war.

---

*"Anti-Arab bias is not an indictment against American society. There are nuts and crazies in every country."*

---

After graduating from the State University of New York at Binghamton and UB Law School, he headed the Arab-American desk of Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. Mokhiber and his wife, Hindy, 32, an American-born Palestinian, have two daughters: Laila, 4, and Lina, 3.

Speaking at the Law School in March, Mokhiber praised the school's progressive approach to human rights. The lessons of UB Law have served him well with the ADC, which has protested, among other abuses, the FBI's interviewing of hundreds of Arab-Americans to investigate hate crimes and terrorism.

"The idea that Arab-Americans have some innate knowledge of terrorism is outrageous," Mokhiber said. "My grandfather fought for the U.S. in World War I, my father fought in World War II, my brother fought in Vietnam, and my nephew is in the reserves. We don't need a litmus test of our loyalty." (The FBI has responded that agents are not supposed to ask questions about an interviewee's political beliefs.)

The ADC's more controversial positions — especially its advocacy of a Palestinian state — have met with emotional opposition, even violence. In 1985, the group's West Coast director, Alex Odeh, was killed by a bomb. No suspect has been arrested. "It was an act of terrorism," Mokhiber says bluntly of his friend's murder.

But now that the war is over, Mokhiber hopes the time is right for substantial discussions on a Middle East peace agreement, including a homeland for the Palestinians.

"I'm very confident," he said, "that the crisis for Arab-Americans is over, and that we're entering a healing phase." ■

UB LAW

FORUM

Fall 1991