

“A lot of people think the prejudice started on September 11. In fact the idea that these people were somehow different from everyone else existed before September 11. Those ideas were simply brought to the foreground.”

were simply brought to the foreground. People were already predisposed to this prejudice,” Cainkar said.

Her conclusion is rooted in research. Cainkar learned while gathering oral histories and conducting more than 100 interviews that a sense of public mistrust is felt not only by Arab and Muslim immigrants, but also by their American-born children. She traced negative sentiments back to the Israeli-Arab War in the 1960s. Perceptions have been molded since then by American foreign policy decisions, media representations, the Gulf War, and immigration policies.

Cainkar’s desire to trumpet the importance of social justice became her motivation to complete such in-depth investigative work. She has long felt a commitment to serve as an impetus for change, which is what led her to Illinois State in the 1970s. Appalled by the state of prisons, Cainkar enrolled with a determination to help create a more humane environment for prisoners.

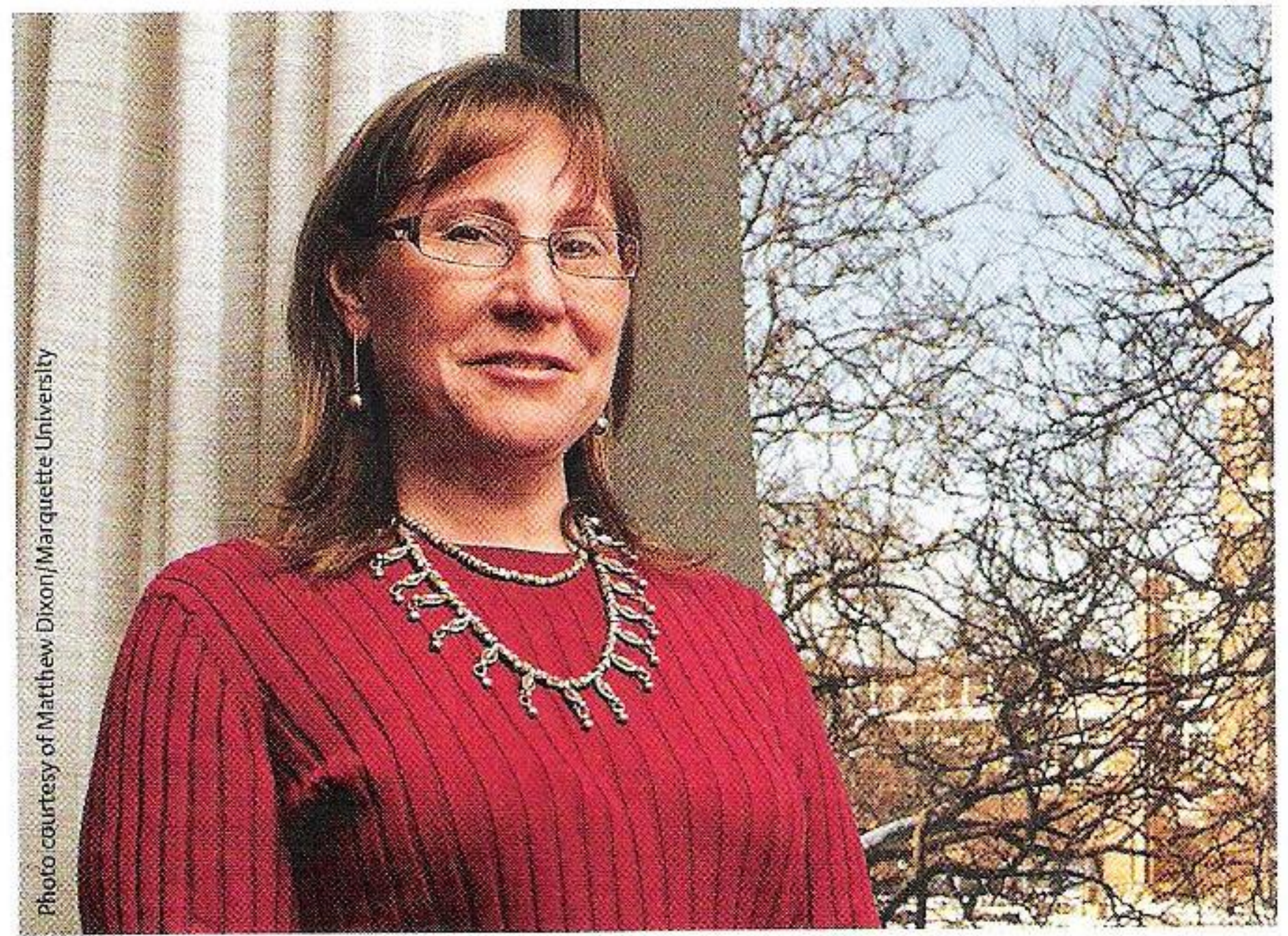
The University was one of few at the time to offer a degree in corrections. As an undergraduate she spent a semester studying the criminal justice model in Sweden. Another pivotal experience during her years at Illinois State was the opportunity to complete an internship at Dwight Women’s Correctional Facility.

“I found the environment depressing,” Cainkar said. The semester she spent immersed in that workplace crystallized a career path for Cainkar. “I realized the issues I was working with were sociological.” She subsequently completed a master’s degree in sociology and again traveled as a student in 1982. This time Morocco was her destination.

“I became interested in the cultural world around me. I felt that I knew nothing about the non-Western world. I just found it fascinating that people lived their lives in very different ways than we do,” Cainkar said.

It was then she began to research Arabs and Muslims, only to discover a dearth of accurate information. What she did find was filled with stereotypes and caricatures, which only fueled Cainkar’s desire to expose preexisting stigmas about specific populations.

To do so meant completing a doctorate in sociology from Northwestern University and more travel. In 1986 she established the Human Rights Research Foundation, and



Louise Cainkar '76 has devoted years to the struggle for global human rights. From a Mosque in the Chicago suburb of Orland Park to the Jordanian desert, Cainkar has traveled extensively and become steeped in other cultures as an Arab and Muslim American scholar.

Cainkar has documented an increase in Muslim American activism, as demonstrated in the annual Muslim Day Parade held on Madison Avenue in New York City, *previous page*. Hundreds of Muslims attended a peaceful rally in New York City to protest offensive cartoons published in European newspaper, *previous page, bottom inset*. Such awareness makes it easier for friendships to form across cultures, *previous page, top inset*.

served as its executive director until 1992. From 1990-1991 she worked in Iraq and Kuwait, documenting the effects of war on civilians. In 1993 she was named a Fulbright Senior Scholar, which allowed her to conduct research in Jordan for two years.

Back in the United States in 1995 Cainkar envisioned teaching, but soon learned academic sociology departments “were not interested in Arabs and Muslims. Also I was frowned upon by academia for being out in the world for as long as I was,” she said, noting her return to the Chicago area came after travels and research throughout Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

Cainkar shifted her focus to community-based research, ultimately becoming project director for a coalition of immigrant organizations in partnership with the State of Illinois. The group conducted research and acted to remove barriers to public services for immigrants. She also served as a senior research fellow at the Great Cities Institute of the University of Illinois, Chicago, prior to joining the Marquette faculty. She now serves on the boards of the Center for Peacemaking at Marquette University, the Arab American Action Network in Chicago, and the Middle East Report in Washington, D.C.

The decades of work took on new meaning after 9/11, which is when Cainkar decided it was time to do something more with the foundational knowledge she had from her earlier research on Arab and Muslim Americans and her years overseas. She received a significant research grant from the Russell Sage Foundation and began conducting interviews