

April Diversity Tip Sheet: Arab in America

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Although it has been over fourteen years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, many Arab Americans continue to find themselves targeted by bias, harassment and exclusion. Much of the fear surrounding the Arab community is driven by a profound lack of knowledge about these members of our community, combined with fear and bias created or exacerbated by some U.S. politicians and media.

Most Arab Americans live in and around major cities. Of the nearly 3.5 million Americans who trace their roots to an Arab country, two thirds of them live in only ten states (California, Michigan, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia). One third of them reside in metropolitan Los Angeles, Detroit and New York.

The majority of Arab Americans are descendants of the first wave of immigration, which began around 1880 and lasted until about 1920. They have roots in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen and 15 other countries. (Persian nations like Iran are not part of the Arab world.) Scholars estimate that among this first wave of immigration, 90% were Christian. The second wave of Arab immigrants arrived in the United States after World War II. Currently 63% of Arab Americans are Christian.

Many Arab Americans were born in the United States. Many do not speak Arabic or dress in traditional clothing. They engage in the same pastimes as other Americans. Arab Americans hold the same jobs and careers as other Americans; however, they are twice as likely to have a bachelor's or graduate degree than the American average. Of the working adults, 73% are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. Arab American incomes are 22% higher than the US national average.

Roughly 82% of Arab Americans are citizens of America. They are, simply, Americans of Arab descent. Recognizable Arab Americans include:

F. Murray Abraham (actor)	Tony Shaloub (actor)
Frank Zappa (musician)	Vince Vaughn (actor)
Marlo Thomas (actor)	Ralph Nadar (activist)
Paula Abdul (singer/dancer)	Hoda Kotb (tv host)
Helen Thomas (journalist)	Joseph Abboud (designer)
Candace Lightner (founder of MADD)	John Baldacci (Governor of Maine)
Kelly Slater (professional surfer)	Doug Flutie (professional football)
Ray LaHood (former US Secretary of Transportation)	
Donna Shalala (former US Secretary of Health and Human Services)	

As terrorism by Muslim extremists continues, Arab Americans bear the brunt of both conscious and unconscious bias. Airport security is on high alert and there are contentions of racial profiling, if not at the very least, geographic flight origin profiling. This profiling by officials and stereotyping of Arab Americans in entertainment vehicles such as television and movies, as well as in media coverage, make it difficult for the rest of the world to eliminate conscious bias and prevent unconscious bias, even when we rationally recognize the error of those biases.

For those of us who witnessed over and over again the bombing of the Twin Towers followed by repeated displays of suspects' pictures, it is difficult to wipe those images from our conscious mind. But we do have a choice *and obligation* to prevent that event, and the continuing war around the world from us, from denying inclusion of our Arab American friends and families into the weave of our culture. They are our neighbors and contributors to our society. And they are in as great a risk of terrorist attacks as any other American.

References and Additional Resources:

Arab American Institute
<http://www.aaiusa.org/>

Caught in the Crossfire
<http://itvs.org/films/caught-in-the-crossfire>

Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society
http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/umages/pdfs/resource_booklets/AANM-ArabAmericansBooklet-web.pdf

Together We Came: Portraits of Arab Immigrants and their Descendants
<http://www.aaiusa.org/together-we-came>

Anything to Fit In: The Struggles of an Arab American
<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/world/2014/12/12/Citizen-or-not-Arab-Americans-face-racism.html>