



Arab American and Chaldean Council (ACC)
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The Arab World Q and A

1. Do Arabs have a shared religion?

No. Arabs belong to many religions including Islam, Christianity, Druze, Judaism, and others. Be careful to distinguish religion from culture. Although Arabs are connected by culture they have different faiths. Common misperceptions are to think that Arab traditions are Islamic, or that Islam unifies all Arabs. Most Arabs are catholic or Orthodox Christians. (Approx. 70% of Arab Americans are Christian)

2. Do all Middle Eastern people speak Arabic?

No – the four main language groups in the ME are Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. Other significant language groups are Kurdish and Berber.

3. Is Arabic the only language spoken within the Arab World?

No, For example, Assyrian and Chaldean use a dialect of the original Aramaic. Berber and Kurdish are other non-Arabic language of the ME.

4. Why did Arabs first come to the United States?

Like many people who came to the US, Arabs were seeking opportunities. Factors in the first immigration were Japanese competition that hurt the Lebanese silk market and a disease hurt Lebanese vineyards. Most early immigrants were from Lebanon and Syria.

5. What is the role of family in Arab culture?

Generally family is more important than the individual and more influential than nationality. People draw much of their identity from their role in the family. Historically, this had fostered immigration in which members of an extended family can help one another immigrate.

6. Why do some Arab women wear garments that cover their faces or heads?

This is a religious practice, not a cultural practice. It is rooted in Islamic teachings about hijab, or modesty. Covering is NOT universally observed by Muslim women and varies by region and class.

7. Who are some prominent Arab-American politicians?

Some include, US Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, and former New Hampshire governor and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu.

8. When should you use the term Arab, Arabic, and Arabian?

Arab is a noun for a person, and is used as an adjective, as in “Arab country”

Arabic is the name of the language

Arabian is an adjective that refers to Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Peninsula, or as in an Arabian horse.

9. Are Arabs mostly a nomadic people?

No most live in urban areas, but portrayals of Arabs as desert dwellers have distorted the picture. Bedouins, nomadic people depicted in movies, make up only 2% of Arab people.

10. What is the charm with the eye or an eye on a hand?

Often worn as jewelry, the hamsa is a non-religious symbol for protection or good luck. The eye, usually blue when colored, wards off the evil eye or evil spirits.