National Arab American Heritage Month
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#ArabAmericanHeritageMonth
EDUCATOR’S CURRICULUM KIT
INDEX

Module I: Overview of the Arab World
Module II: History of Arab American Immigration
Module III: Arab Americans and Religion
Module IV: Arab American Demographics
Module V: Arab American Culture, Customs, and Traditions
Module VI: Arab American Professions, Education, and Achievements
Module VII: Issues Facing Arab Americans
MODULE I: OVERVIEW OF THE ARAB WORLD
Overview of the Arab World

Module Goals

• Understand the distinctions between different geographic classifications in the Arab World
• Identify traits that make up Arab culture
• Recognize the various faith traditions in the Arab World
Arab World Data

Arab World is formerly comprised of 22 countries, represented by the League of Arab States.

*Palestine is comprised of the West Bank and Gaza*
The Arab World can be divided into three major geographical regions:

- The Maghreb (North Africa)
- The Gulf Region
- The Levant
The population of the Arab World is estimated to be at 377.0 million (2014). In terms of age distribution, the population is very young, with a median age of about 22 years. The Arab World had a GDP of $2.853 trillion (USD) in 2012.
The category “Middle East” refers to a region of the world that is linked by a shared location, but *not* a common culture. Therefore, Arab Americans *should not* be referred to as Middle Eastern Americans.
Who are the Arabs?

• Technically speaking, anyone who is a citizen of an Arab country is classified as an Arab.

• Culturally speaking, not everyone who lives in the Arab World sees themselves as Arab.

• It is virtually impossible to create a common Arab persona, given the diversity in the region.

• However, the majority of Arabs are united by a common language (with different dialects), and a shared identity in Arab history and similar customs.
Central Arab Cultural Elements

Three dominant themes can be found across the Arab World, and the descendants that followed those who emigrated:

**FAITH**
Faith plays a very important role in the lives of most Arabs, regardless of their specific faith tradition.

**FAMILY**
Family is an extremely vital element to the lives of Arabs, not only as a source of support, but also of identity.

**COMMUNITY**
An extension of faith and family is community. It is a connection to culture for enjoyable and organizational purposes.
Diversity of the Arab World

The Arab World is extremely diverse in terms of its people, history, dialects, and local customs. There is no one version of Arab culture. While united by a common language and values, these commonalities can obscure cultural diversity that exists.
Religion in the Arab World

Arabs are a people who can encompass all religious faiths. The three Abrahamic traditions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism) are the faiths primarily represented among the Arab peoples.

All three of the Abrahamic faiths share a lineage of certain prophets, and as such bear some commonalities in traditions and faith elements (among other differences).
The Islamic World versus the Arab World

Muslims and Arabs are two different classifications of people. In fact, of the top ten countries with the largest Muslim populations, only three are Arab. While Muslims can be found all over the world, they are predominantly found in parts of Africa and Asia.

Over 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide

1. Indonesia – 204,847,000
2. Pakistan – 178,097,000
3. India – 177,286,000
4. Bangladesh – 148,607,000
5. Egypt – 80,024,000
6. Nigeria – 75,728,000
7. Iran – 74,819,000
8. Turkey – 74,660,000
9. Algeria – 34,780,000
10. Morocco – 32,381,000
Overview of the Arab World

Summary Points

• The Arab world is made up of 22 countries that are members of the Arab League
• The Arab world spans from North Africa to West Asia, giving way to diversity in faith, race, and dialects
• The three largest religious groups in the Arab world are Abrahamic: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
• Faith, family, and community are essential components to Arab culture
Review Questions for Module 1

1. The Arab World is how many countries large?
   a) 15  
   b) 5  
   c) 22  
   d) 33

2. Which is **not** a central component of Arab culture?
   a) Money  
   b) Family  
   c) Faith  
   d) Community

3. Which country has the largest Muslim population?
   a) Egypt  
   b) Saudi Arabia  
   c) Iran  
   d) Indonesia

4. What are three regions of the Arab World?
   a) The Middle East  
   b) The Maghreb  
   c) The Levant  
   d) The Gulf

5. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all Abrahamic religions?
   True or False
MODULE II: HISTORY OF ARAB AMERICAN IMMIGRATION
Arab Immigration into the US

Module Goals

• Understand the impact of US immigration law on immigration patterns
• Recognize the long history of the United States with the present-day Arab World
• Learn the waves of Arab immigration to the United States
• Understand the diversity of Arab immigrants in terms of reasons for leaving their homeland
Immigration laws have the greatest impact on the waves of immigration that any country experiences. While the US has a long (and complicated) immigration history, certain laws have hard particular impacts on Arab immigration waves.
Immigration Act of 1924

- Established quotas that significantly limited immigration from non-Western European countries.

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

- Removed quotas, and expanded immigration preferences for various professional categories, and family reunification.

Anti-Terrorism & Effective Death Penalty Act 1996

- Limited judicial review over immigration cases; established indefinite detention for immigrants after case brought forward; allows use of secret evidence.
The first immigration wave from the Arab World began in the late 19th and early 20th century. The majority of these immigrants were from “Greater Syria”, which is present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel.
The early Arab immigrants shared a number of common features, which included:

– primarily Christians from what is today Lebanon and Syria
– being from generally rural areas
– having little to no education
– initially being composed of men, who were then followed by increasing numbers of women

1st Wave Arab Immigration to the US
The 2nd wave Arab immigrants possessed more diverse characteristics, which included:

– a larger number of Muslims, as well as more Christians

– being from both urban and rural locations

– being highly educated, along with others who had little education

– families arriving together and settling into established immigrant communities
This resulted in a **brain drain**, where highly educated immigrants never returned to their homeland.

Common to many immigrant groups, a brain drain can result in a scarcity of professionals in the ‘old country’, potentially hurting civil, social, and economic development in the Arab World.
The 3rd wave of immigration is marked less by changes in points of origin and characteristics of those arriving.

Rather, the differences lie in the social, legal, and governmental climate resulting, from terrorist attacks in the US, and military involvement in the Arab (and Islamic) World.
Recently, more displacements have occurred as a result of the US war in Iraq, civil war in Syria, and continued conflicts in Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine.

This can create a very different dynamic in the Arab American community, as the motivations of movement can be different (push versus pull).

Additionally, the services required for this population, many of whom have experienced the atrocities of war, can be much greater than previous immigration waves.
Today, Arab (and Muslim) immigration is part of the larger debate on immigration reform in the US. Much of this discussion is in the context of security concerns, and whether or not increased immigration from the Arab World (even in the form of student visas) should be allowed.
History of the Arab American Community

Summary Points

• The US, since its first formation, has had a long history of engagement with the Arab World.
• Changes in immigration law continue to have significant impacts on the Arab American community.
• Arab immigration to the US has existed over 100 years.
• Each immigration wave has its own unique characteristics.
• There are “push verses pull” factors contributing to modern-day immigration.
Review Questions for Module II

1. What features characterized the pre-1924 Arab immigration cohort?
   a) Predominantly Christian  b) Low education  c) Rural population  d) All of the above

2. The *brain drain* refers to what immigration phenomenon?
   a) Reduction of national IQ due to uneducated immigrants  
   b) The taking of educational resources of immigrants from American children  
   c) The loss of educated and skilled persons through immigration to another country.  
   d) A loss of intellectual property through immigrant worker programs.

3. Arab American communities can differ greatly based on factors, such as national origin, immigration wave, demographic characteristics, and Arab identity.
   True    False
MODULE III: ARAB AMERICANS
AND RELIGION
Module Goals

• Understand the religious diversity in the Arab American community
• Identify the dominant religions represented amongst Arab Americans
• Learn about specific religious traits and practices in these groups
• Recognize stereotypes associated with various groups
Given that the Arab World, and more specifically the Middle East, is home to three of the world’s largest religions, it is not surprising to find religious diversity among Arab Americans. This goes beyond the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Within each of these there is more diversity to be found. While much might be shared on one level, subtle differences can result in the formation of different communities and different identity, despite sharing a common national origin.
Based on various reports, 65-70% of Arab Americans are Christian. For those who follow the faith of their ancestors, they primarily fall into what is known as Eastern Rite churches.

Some of these churches, such as the Maronites, Melkites, and Chaldeans, fall under the Catholic Church in Rome. Others, such as the Syrian Orthodox and Egyptian Copts, fall under their own religious orders.

Other Arab Americans left their Eastern Rite churches for Roman Catholic churches as a matter of convenience.
Christian Arab Americans

The Coptic church has its origins in Egypt and very early Christianity. The Copts constitute the largest number of Christians in the Arab World. Copts immigrated to the US primarily after the 1950s. Today, Coptic parishes can be found throughout the US to service its expanding population. It is the largest growing Christian Arab population in the US.

The Maronite church is found in Lebanon, and is an Eastern Rite tradition of the Catholic Church. Early Arab immigrants were Maronite, but left to attend Roman Catholic churches that were more convenient and allowed for assimilation. Today, however, the Maronite Church in the US is very prominent and has led to some returning based on their family origins. Maronites may consider themselves to be more Lebanese American than Arab American.

The Melkite church is also referred to as the Greek Melkite Church, owing to its origins in the ancient world. However, today it is a primarily Arab church in its culture and liturgical home. Primarily found in Syria, it is an Eastern Rite tradition of the Catholic Church. Melkites were part of the early Arab immigration wave, and churches can be found primarily in California, the Northeast, and Midwest.
Christian and Jewish Arab Americans

Orthodox Christianity dates back to the very beginnings of Christianity. The Antiochian and Syrian Orthodox Churches in the US were established early in the 20th century to service its members who began immigrating in the late 1800s. The Orthodox churches can be found throughout the Arab World. Likewise, parishes can be found throughout the US.

The Chaldean Church was found in Iraq, and is an Eastern Rite tradition of the Catholic Church. While early Chaldean immigrants established the first communities, it was not until the second wave after the 1960s that the community really grew. Today, Chaldeans are primarily found in the Detroit area, with five churches. Additionally, four churches can be found in California. There has been a resurgence of teaching the Chaldean language, and many Chaldean Americans may not consider themselves to be Arab Americans.

A minority of Arabs have been practicing Judaism since its founding. Arab American Jews make up an extremely small percentage of the population; they migrated to the US from Egypt, Iraq, and the Levant, mostly. They are often referred to as “Mizrahi” or “Sephardic” Jews. However, since the establishment of Israel, many have dropped the Arabic language and customs in order to be included in the national narrative of Israel.
A Muslim is a follower of Islam. Islam often is viewed as a singular religion. However, it is a diverse religion that has many important distinctions.

The major distinction is between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. Like with all religions, the schisms occur as followers devote themselves to the messages of different leaders, which then become their own branches.

30-35% of Arab Americans are Muslims. This does not account for all Muslim Americans, as many come from non-Arab nations, or are not of immigrant origins (such as the Nation of Islam).

In the past 10 years, most Arab immigrants have been Muslim as compared to 15 to 30 years ago when they were mostly Christian.
The majority of Muslims in the world are Sunni Muslims. Similarly, the majority of Muslims in the United States are Sunni, as well. In fact, the majority of American Muslims are not Arab, but either South Asian or African American. The primary distinction between the two main branches of Islam is who was chosen to follow after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD.

In the Arab World, Shi’a Islam is primarily found in Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Bahrain. Outside of the Arab World, Iran has the largest Shi’a population. In the US, fairly sizable Shi’a communities can be found in places like Dearborn, Michigan. As the Shi’a community has grown, so have their own community institutions, making them a more notable part of the American Muslim setting.

Druze Muslims are primarily found in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel. While a very small part of Islam, their early immigration to the US makes them an important part of many Arab American communities. While Muslim, the Druze incorporate a variety of belief systems into their theology, which is described as a gnostic movement.
Muslim Belief System

As an Abrahamic religion, Muslims share many of the same theological elements as Judaism and Christianity. It is monotheistic, believing in one God. It gives reverence to the prophets associated with Judaism and Christianity, including Moses and Jesus. Muhammad is seen as the last prophet to deliver God’s word on earth. Unlike Christianity, Muhammad is not seen as God. Rather, “there is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Messenger” (a phrase with is known as the shaḥadah).

The word for “God” in Arabic is Allah. It would be the same word used when attending an Arabic religious service whether Muslim or Christian. Saying “Allahu Akbar” simply means “God is Great.” It is similar to saying “Praise God,” although the saying in Arabic has many cultural connotations, depending on the context. In other words, what it means depends on when and how it is used.

Depictions of the Prophet Muhammad are shunned from Islam in order to prevent worshippers from idolizing him like a God. Therefore, Islam is often represented by a picture of the word “Allah”.

اَللهُ
There are five principle components to Islam that all Muslims are supposed to follow during their lives. In general, these tenets are very similar to the tenets of other major religions in that they cover: a belief in God, prayer obligations, charitable giving, ritualistic fasting, and visiting holy sites.
5 Pillars of Islam

*Shahada*: This is the declaration of faith that “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

Every religion has some kind of declaration of faith. This is the fundamental creed for all Muslims to recite. It can be found throughout the Islamic World, including on flags and other important national and religious symbols.
5 Pillars of Islam

**Salat:** This refers to the Islamic daily prayer cycle. Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day, as possible. This can be performed wherever the person is, and is done facing the city of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) and more specifically the Kaabah (the Black Stone building in Mecca). Friday prayer is typically done in a congregation as a mosque.

*iSalam:* Smartphone compass app to find the direction for prayer.
5 Pillars of Islam

Zakat: This refers to charitable giving, which is based on a person’s wealth. As a pillar, it is obligatory that a Muslim does so as she or he is able.

Muslims donate water to Flint, Michigan with Islamic Relief USA

A mosque in Missouri raise funds to help restore vandalized Jewish cemeteries
5 Pillars of Islam

**Sawm:** This refers to fasting that is performed in accordance with the Islamic calendar and traditions, such as during Ramadan. During this holy month, Muslims (as physically able and of a certain age) are to abstain from food and drink during the daylight hours.

Beyond fasting, Ramadan is meant to be a time of other observances, during which Muslims try to be better people (and thus better Muslims).
In Islam, the idea of wearing a *hijab*, or head covering, is rooted in modesty. Whether or not a woman wears a hijab, and the manner in which it is worn, is based more in local cultural customs. Some women will coordinate the hijab worn to match their outfit.

The wearing of the hijab has undergone ebbs and flows in Arab and Muslim society. In the period after September 11, 2001, many more American Muslim women adopted the hijab out of a sense of solidarity to combat the negative reactions aimed at Muslims.

Other women choose not to wear the hijab at all. This can have less to do with a sense of liberation than a personal choice. Also, some wear it in certain contexts only, like religious events or family gatherings.
Arab Americans and Religion

Summary Points

• For those who practice a religion, Arab Americans are predominantly Christian.

• While Shi’a Muslims are a minority in the Islamic World, they constitute a large number of Arab Americans.

• Islam has five pillars to which all Muslims are supposed to adhere (as possible).

• The tradition of wearing the hijab is varied, and not followed by all Muslim women.
Review Questions for Module III

1. Which is **not** a Christian rite to which Arab Americans typically belong?
   a) Melkite  
   b) Maronite  
   c) Orthodox  
   d) Mormon

2. The pillar of *Ramadan* refers to what practice?
   a) Prayer  
   b) Fasting  
   c) Pilgrimage  
   d) Charity

3. Wearing of the *hijab* is rooted in what concept?
   a) Subordination  
   b) Property rights  
   c) Modesty  
   d) Shame

4. Which church has its origins in Egypt?
   a) Zoroastrian  
   b) Coptic  
   c) Melkite  
   d) Protestantism
MODULE IV: ARAB AMERICAN DEMOGRAPHICS
Module Goals

• Identify the common community features of Arab Americans
• Learn the general areas in which Arab American communities can be found
• Understand the diversity among Arab Americans
• Understand the differences between ethnicity and race
On the one hand, we can say anyone who has ancestry in the Arab World could technically be called an Arab American.

On the other hand, not everyone with this ancestry sees themselves as Arab American, just as not everyone with ancestry from other parts of the world sees themselves as being associated with those areas.

For most Americans, ethnic identity is a matter of selecting and choosing from many different ancestral options. Relatively few Americans can be considered “pure breeds” in terms of ethnicity. This is especially true for those whose ancestors came to the United States more than a century ago.

The same is true for Arab Americans, many of whom have greatly varied ancestral heritage from around the world, as well as around the Arab World.
It can be extremely difficult to know how many people there are in the United States who have Arab ancestry. Estimates have been given in the range of 3 to 4 million individuals.

This can be either an over-estimate or under-estimate, depending on who is asked and who is counted. For instance, if a person has a grandparent with Arab ancestry, should that person be counted as Arab American, even if that person does not identify as such?

For many non-European ethnic groups, there can be an expectation that some elements need to be possessed for the person to be seen as a legitimate member of the group, such as identifiable ethnic name, second language ability, relatives in the ancestral homeland. Without those features, the person is not necessarily seen as a member of the ethnic group.
Where do Arab Americans live?

Arab Americans can be found throughout the United States, and literally in every state. However, there are certain areas that are known to have large Arab American communities. Not surprisingly, these are around major metropolitan areas, such as New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, DC. The largest concentration of Arab Americans can be found in Michigan, where some estimate that upwards of 400,000 residents are of Arab descent.
Arab Americans and Race

Officially, Arab Americans are classified as “White” in government statistics regarding racial categories.

This has not always been the case, since much of the Arab World lies on the continent of Asia. As a result, Arab immigrants were not originally classified as White, and thus not eligible for naturalized citizenship under early immigration laws.

Further complicating this, parts of the Arab World lie in North Africa. However, Egyptian Americans are not classified as “African Americans” even though they (or their ancestors) are technically from Africa. At the same time, Sudanese Americans could be classified as Arab Americans, and could also be classified as African Americans since they can more closely resemble what is considered as “Black.”

Under the current administration, the White House is no longer considering a “Middle East and North Africa” checkbox on the 2020 Census to gain a better understanding of Arab American demographics.

Lopez Lomong, Olympic athlete, Sudanese American, African American, and Arab American.
Summary Points

- Arab Americans are in many ways distinct from American society, and in other ways very similar.
- Not everyone with Arab ancestry identifies as Arab American.
- While Arab Americans live throughout the United States, there are certain areas where Arab Americans predominantly live.
- Arab Americans are technically classified as “White” although they come from Asia and Africa.
Review Questions for Module IV

1. How many Arab Americans live in the US?
   a) 1-2 million  
   b) Less than 1 million  
   c) 3-4 million  
   d) 5 million

2. Which state has the highest concentration of Arab Americans?
   a) Michigan  
   b) New York  
   c) California  
   d) New Jersey

3. Officially, Arab Americans are categorized as what race by the U.S. Census?
   a) Asian  
   b) White  
   c) Black or African American  
   d) None of the above

4. Arab Americans choose to identify as Arab based on personal relativity to the culture and their ancestors.
   True  
   False
MODULE V: ARAB AMERICAN CULTURE, CUSTOMS, AND TRADITIONS
Module Goals

• Understand the different ways in which immigrant groups undergo cultural change
• Identify common Arab cultural traits
• Learn specific components of Arab American culture
Assimilation and Acculturation

All immigrant and ethnic groups undergo processes of assimilation, acculturation, and hybridization:

**Assimilation** refers to a process where an ethnic group gives up cultural traditions in order to better fit into a new cultural context.

**Acculturation** involves the adaptation to and adoption of certain cultural traits of the majority society in order to better engage in it. This is while still retaining elements of the traditional culture, which may only be used in the ethnic community.

**Hybridization** can be thought of as incorporating elements from a variety of cultural influences, thereby creating a new mixed form of culture.
Assimilation and Arab Americans

Throughout various points in American history, immigrant groups have tried to assimilate more into American society, going so far as to change names and remove all cultural remnants of their homeland traditions, including Arab Americans.

At other times, there has been greater acceptance of cultural diversity, allowing immigrant groups to keep some traditions, while adopting new ones.

For Arab Americans, the presence of multiple waves of immigration groups has allowed a constant cultural renewal, and created the opportunity for later-generation ethnics to become reacquainted with the culture of their ancestors.
Later generations of Arab Americans generally do not speak the Arabic language. However, an emphasis on maintaining Arabic in the household is strong with first generation Arab Americans and new immigrants.

The Arabic language is comprised of 28 letters, and is written from right to left.
Arab Americans can see two general language patterns. For those who are descendants from the early immigration waves, English is the primary (and perhaps only) language spoken.

For more recent immigrants, they can live in a bi-lingual household. Census data indicates that almost 25% speak English less than “very well.” On the other hand, this means three-quarters do speak English very well.

Depending on the country of origin, other languages, such as French which could be spoken in addition to Arabic.
Arabic Calligraphy

Arabic Calligraphy is the art form in which phrases in Arabic, often taken from the Quran, are written in a beautiful script. This is why it is also known as Islamic Calligraphy.

In its modern form, Arabic calligraphy can be found in the logos of companies, and in representations of animals.
Hospitality is very important in Arab culture and this holds true for Arab Americans, as well. Providing food and drink, such as tea or coffee, is typical when visiting a home, or even business.

It is important that this hospitality is accepted and appreciated, as rejecting such attempts is a breach with customs and norms.

Ahlan wa Sahlan
“Welcome”
Greetings in Arab culture can take on a variety of forms, depending on the context and familiarity between people. Often, a handshake in formal settings will be expected, although this can be withheld by persons who follow the religious tradition of not touching members of the opposite sex who are not related. In these settings, a slight nod, a right hand placed above the heart, or bow will be substituted.

For those who are close friends, a kiss on each cheek may occur. This can occur between men and between women. This is even the case between heads of state.

Marhaba--Hello
Ahlan wa Sahlan--Welcome
Assalaam Alaykum—Peace be upon you (religious expression)
Most celebrations for Arab Americans coincide with religious events and national holidays. These combine both Arab and American traditions, food, and family gatherings.

There are also events to celebrate their ancestral heritage and homeland. Such as *mahrajans/festivals* are opportunities for families to reunite, as well as persons of non-Arab ancestry to experience a taste of Arab culture.

Rihanna Harajli, 3, of Dearborn gets her face painted by Manal Alaktama, 19, also of Dearborn, during Sunday’s Eid Festival.

Our Lady of Lebanon Mahrajan, Wheeling, WV

Dearborn Arab International Festival, photo from the festival site

The cross is carried out of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church in Friday’s Easter service. Photo: Mal Fairclough
Ma’amoul, pastries filled with dates and nuts, is typically enjoyed during holidays, especially during Easter and Ramadan.

Deep-fried zalabieh and awwamat, served in syrup, is eaten for all occasions and is often made during Epiphany.

Mlabbas (Jordan almonds) are almond candies that are served mainly during weddings.

Many variations of baklawa are enjoyed at all celebratory occasions.

As with other cultures, certain foods are associated with certain special occasions. These traditions remain throughout the generations, eliciting fond memories of childhood and homeland.
In the Arab American Home

Within many Arab American homes, you can find elements of ethnic pride and ancestral heritage. This might be in the form of artifacts carried by immigrants, pictures of villages, and/or general symbols of Arab identity.
Summary Points

• Assimilation, acculturation, and hybridization are parts of the processes through which immigrants go through when arriving to a new society.
• While Arab culture is diverse, there are certain traits that are central to it.
• Most Arab Americans speak English as native speakers.
• Food plays a central part of Arab (American) culture and holiday traditions.
Review Questions for Module 5

1. Which is not a process that immigrants typically go through?
   a) Assimilation  
   b) Radicalization  
   c) Hybridization  
   d) Acculturation

2. What traits are important in Arab American culture?
   a) Generosity  
   b) Family  
   c) Food  
   d) All of the above

3. What does the phrase “Asalaam Alaykum” mean?
   a) Life begins at 40  
   b) Death to the infidels  
   c) Peace be upon you.  
   d) Blessed are the peace-keepers

4. Arabic is written and read from right to left.
   True  
   False
MODULE VI: ARAB AMERICAN PROFESSIONS, EDUCATION, AND ACHIEVEMENTS
Module Goals

• Identify the ways in which Arab Americans have engaged in economic activity from their arrival to today

• Recognize the importance of educational achievements in the Arab American community

• Become aware of the scope of Arab American achievements and impact across American society
While many early Arab immigrants sought opportunity in traditional immigrant routes of industrial work and homesteading, *pack peddling* (or peddling) became a hallmark. Peddlers would travel through the country side door to door, selling general products and ‘novelties from the Holy Land’ to customers. All what they needed was the determination to succeed, and a few goods to sell.

This eventually led to the opening of grocery stores, as peddlers looked for more stationary opportunities. Marriage and families also helped, providing the staff needed to run a store, creating a true family business and the achievement of their American Dream.
As with other immigrants, many Arab immigrants worked in manufacturing. After Henry Ford offered “$5 a day” for work, immigrants flocked to Detroit, Michigan to answer the call of higher wages. This led Detroit, and subsequently Dearborn (Michigan), to establishing a very large and diverse Arab-American community.
Immigrant parents wanted a better and easier life for their children. They strongly encouraged them into more professional vocations. Primarily, Arab immigrants looked for their children to become doctors, lawyers, or engineers - jobs that were seen to provide a healthy income, reliable stability, and social status that were part of their American dream.

Doctors, lawyers, and engineers became the calling for many Arab American youth, helping to fulfill the hopes of their parents, and integrating them into American economic life.
Today, Arab Americans are integrated into every aspect of professional and economic life. They continue to be centered primarily in managerial, professional and related professions, as well as in sales. Many would relate this to the entrepreneurial spirit that encompasses Arab culture, which was predicated on trading and business throughout its history back to ancient times.
Arab Americans have historically placed a very high value on educational attainment. This has resulted in Arab Americans having education rates that exceed that of the general US population.

Census reports indicate that over 40% of Arab Americans have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 24% of the general US population.
Notable Arab Americans

Throughout their time in the United States, Arab Americans have contributed in significant ways to American society. Whether it be through their everyday work, extended family, broader community networks, and integration into civic life, their presence (along with that of other immigrant groups), has help to form the nation.

This tradition continues today in ways large and small. The following section identifies prominent Arab Americans across a variety of areas.

Ralph Johns
Organizer behind the Greensboro sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement

Sanaa Hamri
Famous music video and film director

Frank Zappa
Legendary rock guitarist

Alia Shawkat
Actress known for Arrested Development

Taher ElGamal
Cryptographer and inventor of numerous digital algorithms

Ralph Johns
Organizer behind the Greensboro sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement
Notable Arab Americans in Entertainment

Rami Malek
Academy Award Best Actor winner was Egyptian-American Rami Malek for his role in “Bohemian Rhapsody” He was the first Coptic-Egyptian to receive an Oscar.

Gigi Hadid
Palestinian American, Jelena Noura "Gigi" Hadid is an American fashion model who made her debut, ranking as one of the Top 50 Models in America.

Shakira
Shakira Isabel Mebarak is a Colombian singer, songwriter, dancer, and record producer of Lebanese heritage.

Salma Hayek
Lebanese American Actress Salma Hayek's father, Sami, is Lebanese-Mexican, hailing from the city of Baabdat, Lebanon.
There are very notable Arab Americans who have served in politics and areas of activism. These individuals have contributed to the fabric of civic life through their engagement in political activities and commitment to social causes.
Arab Americans have continued the legacy of advancement in science and advancement known in the historical Arab World. In a variety of fields, Arab Americans build on the culture’s emphasis on education through leading research and discovery.

Elias Jame Corey
Organic Chemist and Nobel Prize in Chemistry winner (1990)

Christa McAuliffe
Teacher and Astronaut, killed in the Challenger tragedy.

Edward Said
Professor and Literary Theorist, Cultural Critic.

George Doumani
Geologist, author and explorer in Antarctica

Jack Shaheen
Professor and Media Analyst, focusing on Arab Stereotypes
Notable Arab Americans

Arab culture has a long story-telling tradition. Arab Americans are continuing this tradition through literary, journalistic, and other media formats. The stories they tell and the work they do help to inform social and cultural life.
Notable Arab Americans in Medicine

Danny Thomas
Comedian and actor who went on to found St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. ALSAC in the title refers to the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities.

Michael DeBakey
Renowned cardiac surgeon whose work was instrumental in changing heart surgeries, including pioneering the artificial heart.
Notable Arab Americans in Business

Business and entrepreneurship are viewed by Arabs as part of their cultural legacy. Arab American, descendants of immigrants in search of opportunity, still look for opportunities in business. Some of the most notable innovators in their areas of business are of Arab ancestry, fulfilling the American dream that their ancestors hoped.

- **Paul Orfalea**
  Founder of the Kinko’s copy-center chain.

- **Sam Maloof**
  Furniture designer, craftsman and woodworker, MacArthur fellowship recipient.

- **Farouk Shami**
  Founder of Chi hair products.

- **Steve Jobs**
  Co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Apple, Inc.
Notable Arab Americans in Sports

Arab Americans have excelled in a variety of athletic pursuits, achieving championship status in their respective sports.
Summary Points

• Arab Americans, upon arriving to the US, engaged in a variety of economic activities.
• Some of these, like working in manufacturing, agriculture, and mining, were similar activities to other immigrants.
• Others, like pack peddling, were largely unique to Arab Americans.
• The emphasis on education in the Arab American community resulted in greater educational attainment rates when compared to the general American society.
• Arab Americans have made substantial impacts across a variety of professional and occupational areas, some achieving iconic status in the United States.
Review Questions for Module 5

1. What was the name for the economic activity used by many early Arab Americans?
   a) Cruising  
b) Peddling  
c) Selling  
d) Pawnning

2. What drew many Arab immigrants to Detroit, Michigan?
   a) Pleasant weather  
b) Proximity to Canada  
c) $5 a day for work  
d) Government programs

3. Which job sector has the least amount of Arab American participation?
   a) Fishing and farming  
b) Manufacturing  
c) Sales and office  
d) Service

4. Which famous Arab American founded St. Jude Hospital?
   a) Salma Hayek  
b) Jamie Farr  
c) Danny Thomas  
d) Doug Flutie

5. On average, Arab Americans are less educated than the general US population?
   True  
   False
MODULE VII: ISSUES FACING ARAB AMERICANS
Arab American Stereotypes and the Media

Module Goals

• Understand key concepts related to stereotyping and discrimination
• Identify how stereotypes are spread through types of media
• Examine the pervasiveness of Arab and Muslim stereotypes
• Explore how stereotypes can lead to active discrimination
• Be exposed to attempts aimed at undoing stereotypes and discrimination
Stereotypes & Othering

Stereotypes are preconceived notions that people have about another group, or persons who belong to that group. They are generalizations that are built from noticeable traits, which then come to categorize and define the characteristics of that group.

Even when stereotypes positively depict a group of people (e.g. ‘Asians are good at math’), they can still have a negative impact because they still create the perception that everyone in the group is the same. This process of group generalization and removal of diversity is known as Othering.

Othering refers to a process through which a group (and those belonging to it) are constructed as fundamentally opposite and in an essentially negative way. Like stereotyping, Othering results in a structured perception in which all members of the groups are seen as not only different from, but more importantly less than. This then provides a justification for any treatment in which the group and its members are discriminated.
Ethnocentrism

The traits we notice tend to be those that differ most from traits we are most accustomed to seeing. Ethnocentrism then is the practice of evaluating other cultures and groups in relation to our own, with your own norms and expectations serving as the primary frame of reference for what is ‘normal’.
Stereotypes of Arabs (and Muslims) pervade media in America. In many ways, Arabs are perhaps the most stereotyped group in the media. This is by no means a recent phenomenon, but one that has a long history and legacy.

The portrayal of Arabs and Arab Americans in news and entertainment media can be damaging to the understanding of Arab identity. Arab American actors like Amr El-Beyoumi and Yasmine Al-Massri have spoken out about the lack of three-dimensional roles available to them.

The roles of Arabs in film and television as terrorists, villains, or unnamed bystanders killed by US soldiers can perpetuates harmful stereotypes and indirectly relate all people of Arab background to the bad guys they see in the media.

The TV show Homeland has been accused of trafficking false images of the Arab world. The film American Sniper has been linked to hundreds of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim threats on Twitter.
Coverage of the Arab and Islamic worlds in the news media also have a major impacts when images presented are not balanced.

While one can find news stories that support the predominant stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, there also are stories and framing of events that would provide alternative depictions. However, such stories frequently are ignored in favor of those that support the dominant narrative around Arabs and Muslims.

Assumptions of who is victim and who is aggressor continue to structure how events are covered and images portrayed, especially related to conflicts in the Arab World and Middle East.
Like other forms of media, social media can become a haven for prejudicial and stereotypical representations. Apps like Yik Yak, which allow for anonymous postings and geographic-based feeds, are being used to target members of various ethnic groups (especially on college campuses).
Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games

While video games might be seen as entertainment, they are also a form of mass media. When one considers how much is communicated through video games, there is little doubt that they are a form of media. This is especially the case with today’s games, which create very realistic looking environments in which players almost freely navigate.

Vit Sisler examined how Arabs are represented in video games:

“Within these games, it demonstrates how the diverse ethnic and religious identities of the Islamic world have been flattened out and reconstructed into a series of social typologies operating within a broader framework of terrorism and hostility.”
In October 2013, the satirical news website The National Report issued a ‘story’ that Dearborn, Michigan was going to implement Sharia law. Sharia law is reference to the idea of a strict, fundamentalist Islamic set of laws and penal codes. Dearborn was used in reference to the large concentration of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans who reside there. The story quickly is taken up as evidence of ‘creeping Islam’ in America, despite it not being true.
Despite the fact that definitions of and concerns over ‘domestic terrorism’ span the gamut of political ideologies and social activism, it is the focus on Arab and Muslim Americans that can contribute to the stereotypes and bias that are actively constructed. Some in Congress have called for the explicit profiling of Arabs and Muslim Americans.
Selective perception functions to highlight certain elements that we experience in a way that confirms our previously held beliefs. In this case, Muslim women and Catholic nuns might cover their heads as a symbol of religious devotion. However, the Muslim woman can be viewed very differently (as suppressed, for example) when compared to the Catholic women.
In the years after the attacks on September 11, 2001, discrimination against Arabs and Muslims increased dramatically. A 2010 *New York Times* story stated:

At a time of growing tensions involving Muslims in the United States, a record number of Muslim workers are complaining of employment discrimination, from co-workers calling them “terrorist” or “Osama” to employers barring them from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks.

Such discriminatory behavior could include actions like: offensive language, not allowing the wearing of certain clothing or religious symbols, not reasonably accommodating religious obligations (e.g. prayer), joking aimed at demeaning, unfair evaluation or dismissal, and outright abuse.
Hate Crimes Against Arab Americans

It can be difficult to know the number of hate crimes that have been committed against Arab Americans, largely because the FBI has only been tracking them since 2015. According to the FBI’s 2015 statistics, hate crimes against American Muslims rose 67% in 2015.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has also reported a sharp increase in anti-immigrant hate crimes against Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Americans (who are often confused as Arab or Muslim) since the 2016 presidential elections.
For Arab American and Muslim American students, bullying can be an everyday feature of life. This is further complicated by adults who can share in the biases possessed by those doing the bullying. Global events, such as wars, economic crises, inflammatory political rhetoric, coupled with cultural differences create a climate that is ripe for victimization of children.

In the end, group-based bullying is rooted in the larger social and cultural climate. Images experienced in movies, on television, video games, and music, as well as through the words of educators, create a kind of tacit. In some instances explicit approval targeting Arab and Muslim-American students is permissible, even admirable, when those actions are seen as patriotic.
Rehumanization refers to the process through which people who have been marginalized (or dehumanized) by stereotypical portrayals are reconstructed to appear more human, or “just like everyone else.”

This is done by emphasizing traits that everyone is thought to possess, or at least those who are seen as ‘normal’ and exhibited the normative standard in society.

Areas of emphasis can include: paying taxes, having a professional career, participating in civic activities, raising a family, being educated, and being law-abiding.
Arab American Stereotypes and the Media

Summary Points

• Stereotyping, while a common tendency, and lead to harmful caricatures, even when positive.
• Arab and Muslim stereotypical portrayals are very common in mass media.
• Social media and other forms of media have led to further stereotyping of Arab and Muslim Americans.
• Stereotyping can increase the incidence of discrimination and violence against Arab and Muslim Americans.
Review Questions for Module 7

1. What word relates to preconceived notions that people have about another group?
   a) Ethnocentrism  
   b) Discrimination  
   c) Stereotype  
   d) Confirmation Bias

2. What word relates to the practice of evaluating other cultures and groups in relation to our own?
   a) Ethnocentrism  
   b) Discrimination  
   c) Stereotype  
   d) Confirmation Bias

3. The process through which people who have been marginalized are reconstructed to appear more human is known as what?
   a) Rehumanization  
   b) Dehumanization  
   c) Self-perception  
   d) Ethnocentrism

4. Bullying attitudes have been found to be influenced by video games.
   True  
   False
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