



Addressing Anti-Arab Backlash Due to Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks

The terrifying events of Sept. 11 brought the world to attention. The calculated tactics of terrorists resulted in many people losing their lives. And for the rest of us, the world will never be the same.

Reactions to this tragedy have shown the best and the worst in people. Rescue workers, blood donors, Red Cross volunteers and others have rallied to help those in need. Stories of heroes making sacrifices and showing solidarity and support have peppered the news since that tragic day.

On the flip side, a nasty byproduct of the attacks has been the expression of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab sentiments. People have received death threats, hate messages have swirled throughout the Internet and well-being has been put in jeopardy. Misdirected anger, fear and hatred have resulted in backlash of the worst kind.

It's understandable that people are angry. It makes sense that they are frightened. Yet, scapegoating and attacking innocent people who happen to have similar cultural and religious backgrounds to the alleged terrorists--that makes no sense whatsoever. The same thing happened right after '95's Oklahoma City bombing before American terrorists were found at fault.

"Regardless of who is ultimately found to be responsible for these terrorist murders, no ethnic or religious community should be treated as suspect and collectively blamed," the Arab American Institute said in a statement. We've gathered some facts about Arab Americans for you to share as we strive for global understanding.

Arab Americans in a Nutshell

Census reports say that over one million Arab Americans live in the United States, although many believe those numbers are under-reported. Here are a few facts:

- **Over two-thirds of Arab Americans live in 10 states.** New York, New Jersey and southern California often attract

new immigrants.

- **Over one-third live in Los Angeles, New York City and Detroit,** with a heavy concentration--20 percent of the overall population--in the neighborhood of Dearbon, Mich.
- **A higher-than average number**--36 percent--have bachelor's degrees due to a cultural emphasis on education.
- **The majority of Arab Americans** are native born and 82 percent are citizens.
- **Approximately 72 percent work in administrative,** managerial, professional, technical, or sales jobs.
- **The majority of Arab Americans** are Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi and Egyptian, although they come from 23 different countries of origin.
- **Prominent Arab Americans include** former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, football player Doug Flutie, actress Kathy Najimy, DJ Casey Kasem, singer Paula Abdul, White House press corps dean Helen Thomas, Challenger astronaut teacher Christa McAuliffe, and Consumer advocate Ralph Nader.

Understanding Islam

"Islam" means "submission," which is derived from a word meaning "peace." Islamic doctrine requires a combination of faith and good works. Muslims believe in heaven, hell and final judgement --all beliefs that are outlined in the Qur'an. This sacred writing is a record of God's words dictated to the Prophet Muhammed by the angel Gabriel. It discusses hell and paradise as well as the nature of Allah, Muslims' one and only God.

The crescent or New Moon symbolizes the religion of Islam, founded by the Prophet Muhammed in the seventh century. Muslim accept him as the final messenger of Allah. Muhammed preached against

worshipping multiple gods or idols.

Over 950 million believers make Islam the second largest world religion. A growing population of Muslims in the United States--over six million--join believers in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. They observe the Five Pillars of Islam:

- 1. Shahada.** Allah is the only God and his prophet, Mohammed, deserves allegiance.
- 2. Salat.** Ritual prayers that are performed five times every day, facing Mecca, the Saudi Arabian holy site.
- 3. Sakat.** The charity of giving alms to those in need.
- 4. Hajj.** Making a pilgrimage to Mecca if monetarily and physically possible.
- 5. Sawm.** Fasting during the day throughout the holy month of Ramadan.

Other tenets include honoring modesty which results in women wearing hijabs (headcovers) and men wearing beards, and no inter-faith marriages.

Sources: *Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia* at www.grolier.com; www.islamicity.com; *The Arab-American Journal* at www.arabamerican.com; *The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee* at www.adc.org; *The Arab American Institute* at www.aaiuas.org (Includes "Arab Americans: Making a Difference" by Casey Kasem) by Julie Phillips, a member of the Paper Clip Communications editorial staff

*** Ramadan is the Islamic Month of Fasting** which begins on Nov. 16 this year (Islamic holidays are based on the lunar calendar). This is the holiest month of the year for Muslims who may take no food or water from sunrise to sunset if they have reached puberty. This daily fast is typically broken by taking a sip of water and biting into a sweet fruit, such as a date. During this month, many Muslims pray, worship at home or mosque and read the Qur'an (Koran), the holy book of scriptures. The revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohammed is commemorated during the festival of Laylat al-Qadr.

Source: 2001 Multicultural Resources Calendar, Diversity Resources, Amherst, MA.