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# THE ARAB WORLD

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Arabs are diverse people who live in **22 nations** in Southwest Asia and North Africa collectively called the Arab World. These Arab countries cover 5.25 million square miles, with a total population of approximately **350 million**. They are:

*Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.*

The word “Arab” embraces more than the multiethnic and multiracial Arabic-speaking people living in these countries. In addition to language, Arabs are unified by culture and several strands of common history, particularly having lived under the Islamic Empire.

The Arab people trace their ancestry to Abraham and Shem, the eldest of Noah’s three sons. They originated thousands of years ago in Arabia, an area in southwestern Asia known today as the Arabian Peninsula. Great Semitic migrations originated from Arabia. The Assyrians, Arameans, Canaanites (including the Phoenicians and Hebrews) came from the Arabian heartland. From the north of Arabia came the Nabateans. In the Arabian south, the Minaeans, Sabaeans, and Himyarites founded flourishing states.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century AD provided the largest and most significant movement out of Arabia. The Arabs spread northwards and westwards, to the furthest point of North Africa as well as to and beyond the borders of Spain and China.

Arab contributions to human knowledge were enormous during the ‘Golden Age’ of Arab civilization (7th to 13th centuries). Arab mathematicians improved on the Hindu concept of zero, developed the systems of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Arab astronomers established longitude and latitude, investigated the speeds of sound and light, and explored the possibility that the Earth rotated on its own axis. Some of the most famous medical authorities of the Middle Ages were Arabs. Advances in architecture, agriculture, navigation, geography, and the recording of world history resulted from Arab industry and genius during this period.

Today, after centuries of Ottoman then European colonial rule, the Arab World is again a significant cultural and economic force in world affairs.

Although the Arab identity is closely aligned with Islam, we must remember that the Arabs existed as distinct people long before the rise of Islam. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all born in the Middle East, and followers of all three monotheistic religions lived in harmony for centuries. Today the majority of Arabs are Muslims, while five per cent of all Arabs are Christians. They are the descendants of the early believers. In addition, a very small Jewish minority still lives in some Arab countries. Arabs from all faiths pray to ‘Allah.’ The word ‘Allah’ is the Arabic translation of the word ‘God’.

In the United States, there are about 3.5 million Americans of Arab descent. The estimated number of Arab Americans in Georgia is 35,000, of whom approximately 20,000 live here in Atlanta.

*The information in this flier was compiled by Rima Houssami for educational use only  
References: The Arab World Notebook. Edited by Audrey Shabbas and Ayad Al-Qazzaz, 1989.  
The Arabs: A Short History. Philip K. Hitti Author. Gateway Editions, 1985.*

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