

Tracing Your Arab American Roots

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Definitions Used in Presentation

- **Arab Americans** – Individuals residing in the United States from, or descendants from, countries identified as Arab
- **MENA Region** – Middle East North Africa Region
- **SWANA Region** – Southwest Asia North Africa Region

Research Considerations

- Definition of who is Arab is not consistent – most commonly identification comes from the 22 countries of the Arab League.

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

- There are people of many other ethnic/cultural-identities in the region that do not identify as Arab.

Examples

Afghan, African, Armenian, Assyrian/Chaldean Azerbaijani, Circassian, Georgian, Imazighen (Berber), Iranian, Kurdish, Turkish, etc.

- There are diverse religious identities and records.

Issues Hindering Research

- There are no clear Arab or MENA/SWANA identifications in US records.
- US records use changing identities for Arabs or others from the region.
- Spelling variations and naming practices are unfamiliar to researchers.
- There are language barriers to research.
- There is limited research on enslaved North Africans who may have identified as Arab or spoke Arabic.

Historical Considerations (Make locality guides or study history of the region)

- MENA region historical context



- US historical context

Where to start – Before looking at records

- **Around the house** – What records do you have or you can get from family members? Documents, photos, objects, etc.
- **Interview family members** – Do you have living relatives in the US or internationally that you can interview about your family history?
- **Write down what you know** – Write out or use a computer program to include all you know about your family history - names, places, dates, stories.

Resources & Archives

(US & International)

- Genealogy Research Sites
- Libraries (Public, University)
- Archives
- Social Media Groups
- Religious & Ethnic Groups
- Country, City, Town, Community Organizations
- Government Agencies

Methodology Tip

- Use Google Translate to translate from English name to Arabic for online searches (not great for the other way around because Arabic names have meaning that are literally translated)
- Use FAN research (Elizabeth Shown Mills) also known as cluster research – Arabs often travel together or to a place someone else had already visited.

PRACTICAL STEPS

1 - begin with what you know

2- interview and ask questions

3 - research online databases

4 – research in person in the United States

5 – DNA tests

6 - research abroad

Immigration Record Tips

- Check records going in & out of the United States
- Check naturalization records
- Check border crossings from Mexico, not only passenger lists
- Check consular records – registrations, birth abroad

Arabic Name Tips

- In most Arab countries, legal documents list 4 names–given name, father's name, grandfather's name and family name–instead of the Western use of 3 names. Upon immigration to the US, the family or clan name might be dropped.
- Traditions – Father's name as middle name or eldest son named after grandfather
- Dashes/spaces optional – Example: *Abdul-latif* same as *AbdulLatif* and *Abdul Latif*
- Spelling variations – Example: *Sabreen* same as *Sabrine* same as *Sabrin*

Research Resources

- **US Records** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-american-genealogy-research
- **International Records** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-genealogy-research

DNA – Genetic Genealogy

- **Testing** – Many Arab Americans are taking autosomal DNA tests, also Y and Mitochondrial DNA on *Family Tree DNA*.
- **Family Tree DNA Group Projects** – Group Projects provide communities for people who are interested in a specific topic. There are at least 18 groups related to Arab DNA – some country specific and others are name specific.

Where to find more information on tracing your Arab American roots:

National Society for Arab and Arab American Genealogy (NSAB) - The mission of the organization is to foster interest in Arab & Arab American genealogy, by encouraging education, research, writing & recording family histories and preserving records.

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