



Dearborn Michigan

America's Muslim Capital

Hi! My name is Karen. I live in Dearborn, a large suburb of Detroit, Michigan. I am 16 years old and attend school at Dearborn High. My school is several miles from the large mosque, The Islamic Center of America. My great-great grandparents emigrated from Syria to work at the Ford Motor Company where my father is employed. I enjoy living in Dearborn. Last year some of my distant relatives moved here from Iraq. They had a difficult life in Iraq and were allowed to immigrate to America because of the war. It was fun to show them around Dearborn and to see their reaction to all the sights of the city. They had never seen anything like this in Iraq.

Our family is Muslim. The first thing I hear at 5 a.m. is the prayer call. Sometimes I do not get up right away to say my prayers. I usually get up when I hear the prayer call, but sometimes I am so tired that I just turn over in my bed and go on sleeping. I enjoy hearing the call ringing out over the loud speakers from the nearby mosque five times a day.

There are many people with Arab ancestry here in Dearborn and in Detroit. We are Arab-Americans. At

times, and especially after 9-11, people say bad things about us. Sometimes some of the students at school taunt us with, "You're from the Taliban!" and say other mean things about us. My parents told me to not get upset when people mistreat us because they do not understand. Some people don't trust us and even think we might be terrorists just because we are Arabs.

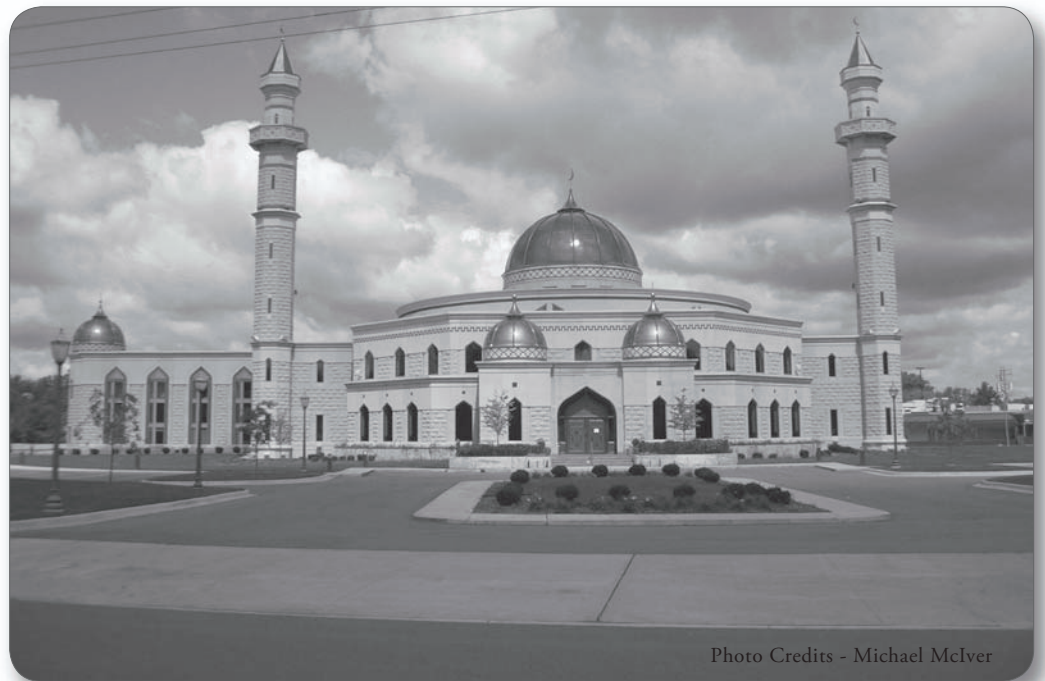


Photo Credits - Michael McIver

There are five large mosques in Dearborn. Our family often goes to the mosque to pray and listen to Islamic teaching by Imam Hassen Qazwini. Construction of The Islamic Center of America began in 1999 and when complete it will be the largest

mosque in the United States. Currently the largest mosque is the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo in Ohio. Next year our family is planning a trip to Toledo to visit Uncle Amir and Aunt Rashida. I am so excited about seeing my cousins again! While we are there, we will also visit the Islamic Center.

In the year of 1905, my ancestors emigrated from Syria. Many other immigrants also came from Syria and Palestine. The American economy was booming and many people were able to find work here to support their families. My family, along with many other Muslims, worked at the Ford Motor Company. Many Christians also emigrated from Syria and General Motors employed many of them. This migration all ended in 1924 when the U.S. Congress passed laws that slowed Arab immigration down to a trickle. Many Americans did not like Arabs and thought they were un-American.

There are other religions here in Dearborn including Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. During the Great Migration in the late 1800's and early 1900's many of the Arabs who moved here were Orthodox Christians. By 1924 approximately 95,000 Syrians had migrated to the Dearborn area. Approximately 90% of these migrants were Syrian Orthodox Christians. Dearborn has 5 mosques and 54 churches. There are also many people here who do not practice any religion.

It is not always easy to be a Muslim and live in America. Islam is a very strict religion. Here in America, there are not many devout Muslims who practice Islam consistently. Some of my friends who say they are Muslims do not even fast during Ramadan. Many of the Muslims here in Dearborn only pray once or twice a day. But the Koran says that we must pray 5 times a day and fast during the month of Ramadan. I know only several people who have gone on pilgrimage to Mecca. My parents sometimes talk of moving back to their roots in Syria or Iran. They think it might be easier to practice Islam away from this Western culture. Sometimes I get tired of trying to be a Muslim. I



argue with my parents about why I have to wear a hijab, the Muslim headscarf. Many of my “Muslim” friends at school do not wear it at all. But whenever I think about rebelling against my religion, I always remember that the Koran teaches that if your good works outweigh your bad works then you have a better chance of entering Paradise. The other day, Brenda, one of my classmates, was telling me how she believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is the only way to get to Heaven. I like Brenda, she seems to be different than most of the other students. She is always so friendly and peaceful. I wish I could be more like her.

Did You Know?

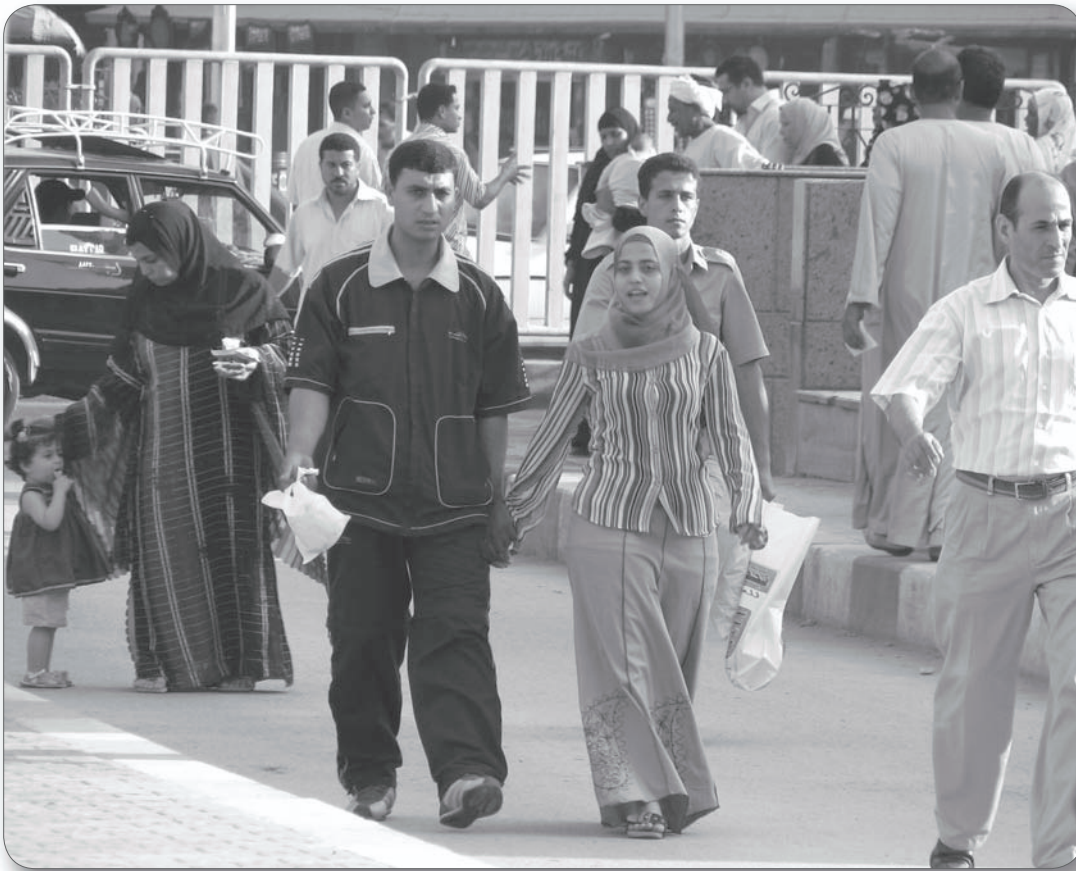
- Muslims believe that Jesus...
 - was born of a virgin.
 - was sent by God to tell the world His will.
 - had a messenger that went before him and that this messenger (John the Baptist) had a miraculous birth.
 - was a prophet of God and is respected among Muslims.
 - performed many miracles.
 - was not crucified. Another man was crucified and the people only said that it was Jesus.
 - is not God. (John 10:30)
 - cannot take away sin (John 1:29).

Religion in Dearborn

Many major religions are represented in the Arab American community in Dearborn including Christians (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and Muslims (Sunni, Shia, and Druze).

The first Muslim mosque built in the United States was in Highland Park in 1923.

The earliest Arab immigrants to the Detroit area were primarily Christians with a few Muslims mixed in. Even today, the majority of Arab immigrants are from Orthodox Christian background. There are even some Arab Jews.



- Arab culture is known for its friendly hospitality and for being family oriented.
- One of the many challenges that American Arabs face is that America is making them more independent while their culture mandates collectiveness.
- A “Brain Drain” occurred the 50’s in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries when many Arabs immigrants came to America to study. Many of these people intended to return to their homeland to practice, but employment opportunities abounded and many stayed and found work in America. This resulted in these countries losing their most skilled and educated workers. This explains why so many doctors and other professionals in America are of Arab descent.
- The average American Arab earns more in one year than the average American.
- Islamophobia can be defined as an irrational fear or prejudice towards Muslims and the religion of Islam.

Immigration in Dearborn

Yemenis established their presence in the area in the 1920’s.

Approximately 3000 new Iraqi immigrants were permitted to move to the U.S. following the first Gulf War; however, today it is increasingly difficult for Iraqis to immigrate.

After WW1 and the establishment of the State of Israel, many displaced Palestinians migrated to America.

The Lebanese came during their civil wars in the 70’s and 80’s after the US lifted some of its strict immigration restrictions that only Europeans can come.



Waves of Sudanese came during the 90's when their civil war reached its climax.

Author's note

Quick Facts about Dearborn

- Population of Wayne County – 2,000,000
- Wayne County is one huge metropolis of 2 million people and has 33 cities, including Dearborn and Detroit.
- Population of Dearborn – 92,000
- 40% Arab population
- Second largest concentration of Arabs and Muslims outside of the Middle East (second only to Paris)
- Large German, Polish, and Irish population
- Only 10 miles from Canada
- Named after General Henry Dearborn
- In 1918, half of all cars in America were Model T's built by Henry Ford in Dearborn.
- Pharmacist James Vernor created the nation's first soda —Vernors — in Detroit in 1862.

The above fictional story is meant to give you a better understanding of the spiritual needs in many cities in America. There are numerous other communities like Dearborn, Michigan where many people of other cultures live. If you cannot serve the Lord in missions abroad, then we encourage you to befriend some people from other ethnic groups in your own “back-yard” and show them the love of Jesus. They can then take the Gospel to their “own” people in their “own” country. We encourage you to broaden your vision and not think of these people as foreigners. They are not foreign at all but are people from the different ‘tribes and nations’ that God wants around His throne!

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Population by Nationality

