

Capstone: The Stories Behind the Stereotype  
Noor Kreidie

For my capstone project, I wanted to understand why the stereotype of Arab-Americans working simple jobs came to be. I researched the different waves of immigration from the middle east, but the part that I most wanted to show was the stories behind the stereotype.

## Kareem

Kareem currently works at Al-Amana grocery store. Al-Amana is a middle eastern grocery store that is attached to the Al-Aqsa Islamic Society a mosque mainly serving the Syrian and Palestinian community, located in Kensington. He's from Hebron, Palestine. Hebron called the divided city is usually used as an example of the city which shows the most extreme version of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 1967 after the six-day war Hebron went under Israeli control. The conflict has only become tenser through time, there are two main places in Hebron one is called H1 and the other is called H2. H1 is the Palestinian side and H2 is the Israeli side. Kareem lived in Hebron his whole life and had a relatively normal life. He went to school, he had small jobs after school, etc. Then it was time to go to college, he wanted to study radio journalism, so he decided to go to Syria. He went to the University of Aleppo. But in his second year, the war started heating up and he had to go back to Hebron. After a year in Hebron, he and his family made their way to the United States for a better life and dreams for him to finish his degree in an American university. After many calls to universities, it was spelled out to him that the work that he had done at the University of Aleppo wouldn't be credited in the United States. So he has been in this country trying to find jobs without any degree.

## Abu-Mohammad

Abu-Mohammad also works at Al-Aqsa Islamic center he is pretty much the handyman fixing all the little mundane projects, in return he lives at the mosque. He's originally from Jordan, but his story doesn't end there. He used to be a truck driver he would drive everything from produce to manufacturing equipment. He had two main routes, he would start from Amman the first stop would be Syria, then Turkey, and then from there he would either follow the Mediterranean sea to Bulgaria than to Romania, or he would follow the black sea to Georgia then to Russia. He's an older man and from a small village outside of Amman, and education wasn't as prevalent as it is today, he never had the opportunity to go to college that was never in the question for him. I don't know if he even finished high school, all I know is when he was of age to drive he did. He seemed to enjoy this job, he has so many stories of all the places he was able to travel. When telling me his story his face lights up. This job led him once to spend two years in Europe stationed in Germany, and he couldn't say better things about Germany. He's been in the United States for about ten years now, he would be happy to drive a truck all around the United States but unfortunately, it seems no job wants a Jordanian late sixty-year-old driving their trucks. So now he fixes little things, he will paint a wall here, hang a picture there, fix a printer there. This job was perfect for him, he was once of the lucky ones, able to leave his village. A village in which no opportunity was possible, he was able to find a way out.

Asmaa

Every Saturday at the Al-Aqsa Islamic center there is a Share food drive providing around two hundred families around Philadelphia with food. On one Saturday a woman in a red coat, blue and tan hijab, and a long blue skirt came up to the drive as we were closing down. We had had an extra pallet of food delivered that week and so we had a lot extra. We were getting ready to take the food to a local church that gave out food every Monday and had plenty of refrigerator space which was essential because most of the boxes that Share gives out are dairy and meat products. She came to us and asked for a box, as someone was helping her put the heavy box in her car. She took me aside and asked if she could take a few extra boxes, seeing that we had many extras I said sure and asked how many she wanted. Usually, when people ask for extra food they only ask for one box, but she said that she would take six. Before I could ask why she needed so many extras, she told us that she lives on a block with a lot of older people and that her older neighbors relied on other people to get food for them. And so we loaded the rest of her trunk with the extra boxes. As we were doing this she and her husband began bickering in Arabic. Soon after her husband went into the driver's seat, and she came up to me again. She first thanked me and said that I was doing God's work for giving out food after she said that her husband didn't want to take the food because the meat in the box was not halal and that taking non-halal meat even if it's for other people wasn't right. She disagreed with him and said that she thought it was better that people were eating even if it wasn't halal meat, and that God would forgive them because he would rather have people have some food in their mouths than none at all. As I closed the trunk she thanked me again.

The week after she came back and this time she again took the extra boxes for her neighbors. I was allowed to talk to her more, and she told me that she was Moroccan from Tangier, she had lived in the United States for around six years now and her first child was about to go to kindergarten. She continued about how she wanted her child to go to the best school and learn everything that they can. One of the most important things she wanted was for her child to learn English perfectly, unlike what she was able to do as she had just begun to take English classes at the mosque.

### The Azimi Brothers

There is a small plot with used cars and a small trailer office surrounded by a fence off of Roosevelt boulevard. This is A2Z used cars, owned by The Azimi Brothers. The Azimi Brothers are two brothers from Iran, that came to the United States in the late 80s. They are from a middle-class family in Tehran, both brothers excelled in school and had an itch for the sciences. After high school, both brothers being two years apart went to the University of Tehran. One

brother graduated with a degree in AeroSpace engineering, the other with a degree in AstroPhysics. After college, they both spent time in labs, and after a while went back to school. Both brothers gained their doctorate degrees. Seeing as there was not so much opportunity in Iran they decided to bring themselves to the United States. When they came to the United States they ran into a problem with jobs, not meaning that there weren't jobs but that they were told that they weren't qualified for the jobs. Let it be known that this was after the Iran hostage crisis and at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. They were told that even though they had degrees they couldn't be credited in the United States meaning that their Ph.D.'s from an Iranian university were at the same level as someone who had never even finished high school. So now they run a used car shop.

Amin

Amin is the owner and chef at Al-Amana grocery store. He's originally from Amman, Jordan, and came to the United States in the 90s, throughout his time here he worked many jobs for a dream to bring his wife and mother over and to be able to have something of his own. He accomplished all those things, he's truly a wonderful cook, if you are lucky enough to go to the Al-Amana grocery store on a Friday you will be able to have his chicken Swararma which has been marinating on a spit since the early morning hours. I don't know about his level of education, but I do know how proud he is about his only child his son going to Franklin and Marshall College. He knows that his son was able to live in a country where he could do anything that he wanted to, and he wasn't limited in the way he was.

Bibliography:

Abraham, Nabeel. "Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States," in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, edited by Ernest McCarus. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

*Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in the U.S. and Canada: A Bibliographical Guide with Annotation.* Edited by Mohammed Sawaie. Lexington, Kentucky: Mazda Publishers, 1985.

Abraham, Nabeel. "Arab Americans." Countries and Their Cultures. EveryCulture.com. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Arab-Americans.html>.

Foad, Hisham S., Waves of Immigration from the Middle East to the United States (December 20, 2013). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2383505>

Batalova , Jeanne, and Mattea Cumoletti. Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States. migrationpolicy.com, February 2, 2021. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/middle-eastern-and-north-african-immigrants-united-states-2016>.