A Study of Socioeconomic Status of Arab Americans

Key Words:

Arab American, Socioeconomic Status, Class, Education, Occupation, Income

This paper will examine socioeconomic status of Arab Americans in the United States. Given that Levels of education, income, and occupation of a given group determine socioeconomic status of that group, this paper will attend to the level of education, occupation, and income of Arab Americans relative to the American population as a whole.

Key Points:

- Arab Americans on average are more educated than the rest of the American population.

- Average income of Arab Americans is higher than the rest of the American Population.

- Many of the Arab Americans who migrate to the United States are formally education in engineering, law, and medicine.

- Arab American community is a diverse group, made up of people who can trace their ancestry back to 22 different countries.

- Arab Americans are concentrated mostly in the large urban cities such as New York and Los Angeles.

Socioeconomic Status of Arab Americans:

In understanding the socioeconomic status of Arab Americans in the United States, it is useful to have a general understanding of different waves of Arab migration to the United States and the level of skills that the first generation Arab Americans possessed. The first Arab that was

brought to North America is believed to be Zammouri, who was sold to slavery in Morocco in 1511 and arrived to Florida in 1528 (Arab American Museum). Since then, a large number of Arabs have migrated from 22 different Arab countries (Figure 1). The first wave of migration led to nearly 200,000 Arabs living in the United States by 1924 and the second wave came during the 1960s and 1970s.

The second wave of Arab migrants can be divided into two major groups: first, highly educated Arabs who were mainly scientists, engineers and doctors; second, unskilled single men who came to work in the labor jobs such as mining and automobile industries. The third wave of Arab migration to the United States, which began in 1970s, has mainly included students who have come to the United States for a better education and also contains some who migrated from their war-torn countries. Currently there are at least 3.5 million Arab Americans living in the United States.
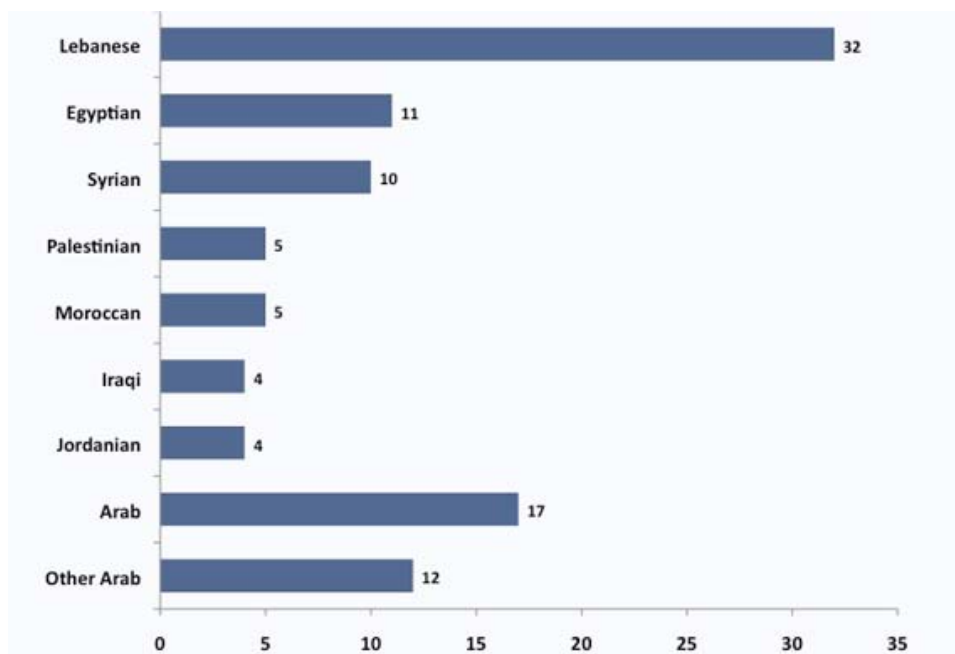

Figure 1: Make up of Arab American Population: (Source: Arab American Institute)

Although Arab Americans currently live in all 50 states, two third of the total population is concentrated in 10 states, with California, New York and Michigan having the highest rate of Arab American concentration. 94 percent of Arab Americans live in the metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York (Arab American Institute). High concentrations of Arab Americans in the large cities, where the cost of living is relatively higher, gives a clue to the relative higher socioeconomic status of Arab Americans in comparison to the rest of the population.

According to U.S. Census, Arab-Americans – both native born and immigrants – have a higher level of educational achievement than the average U.S. population: over 46 percent of Arab Americans have higher education, in comparison to 28 percent of U.S. population (Arab American Institute). As one could expect, with higher rate of graduate and post-graduate degrees, Arab Americans have been able to obtain many professional positions with higher salaries.

Although Arab Americans can be found today working in all fields, this focus on education has led many Arab Americans to be concentrated in professional fields such as a medical, Law, and engineering (Arab American Museum). About 66 percent of Arab American adults are in the labor force with 5 percent unemployment. 73 percent of Arab Americans are in managerial, professional, sales or administrative fields (figure 2) (Arab American Institute).

As one would expect, having more professionals in fields such as law, medicine and engineering creates more income for Arab Americans, relative to the national average. Median income of Arab American households in the United States is $59,012 compared to a median income of $52,029 for all households in the United States (Figure 3).

Despite having a higher average income than American general public, there are many Arab Americans who would classify as poor, living about or below poverty. Especially in a state

such as Michigan, because of the economic downturn, many Arab Americans have lost their livelihood. Access Community, an Arab American community service organization, reported in 2010 that its clients, who needed assistance of some sorts, were mainly between 20 to 39 years of age, and had a household income of less than $20,000 (Access Community 2010 Annual Report).
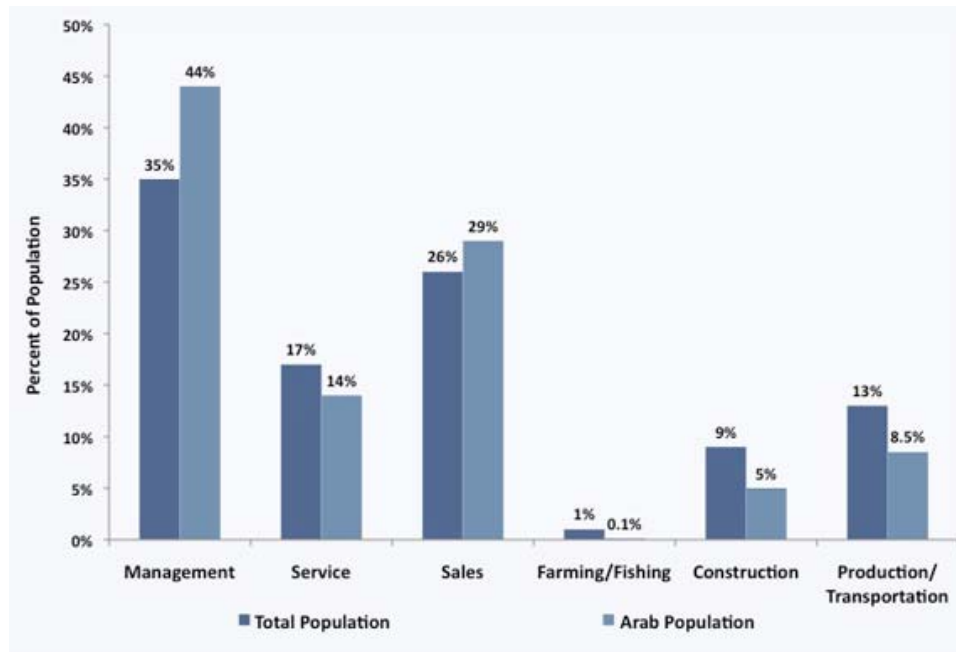

Figure 2: Occupation of Arab Americans Source: Arab American Institute
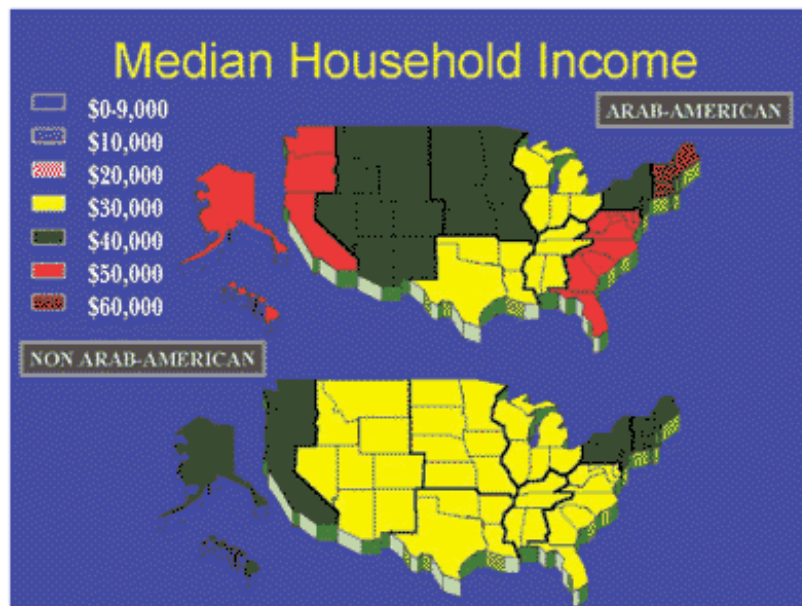

Figure 3: Median Household Income of Arab American (Source: Allied Media)

Useful Links:
www.accesscommunity.org
www.arabamericanmuseum.org
www.aaiusa.org
http://www.centeraap.org

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