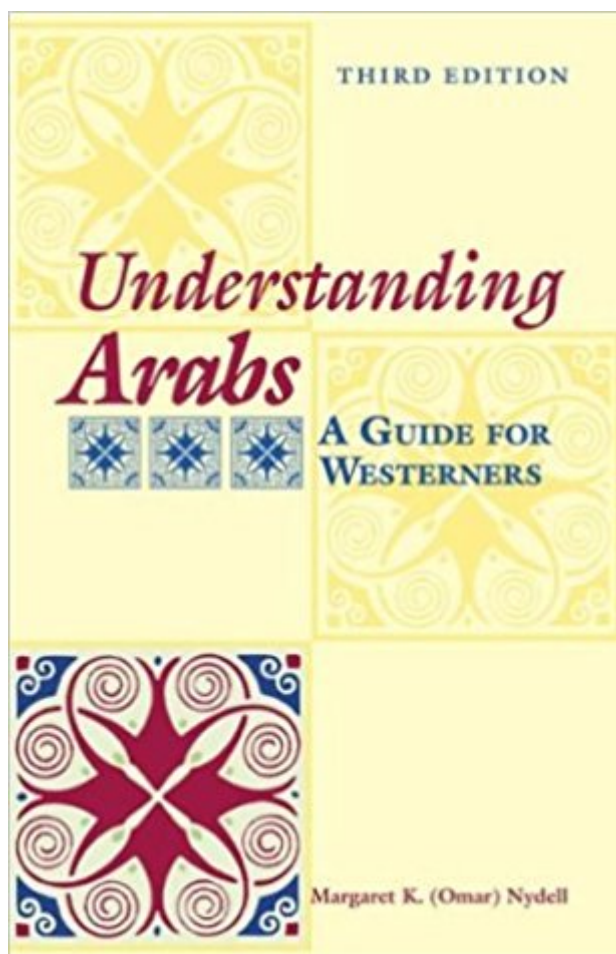


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Understanding Arabs: A Guide For Westerners (The Interact Series)



Synopsis

From the rise of fundamentalism to the historically uneasy relationship between the Arab World and the West, Margaret Nydell has expanded her highly respected book to bring today's complex issues into clearer focus. This third edition of "Understanding Arabs" introduces the complexities of Arab culture and Islam in an evenhanded, unbiased style. The book covers such topics as beliefs and values, religion and society, the role of the family, friends and strangers, men and women, social formalities and etiquette, and communication styles.

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Customer Reviews

Understanding Arabs provides an objective examination of Arab values, beliefs, and perceptions and compares and contrasts them with those of Westerners. Margaret Nydell highlights the dynamic patterns of change that have influenced the Arab World in recent times and offers illuminating insights into the minds and hearts of Arabs, while avoiding the political quicksands that lay in the path of Arab-Western relationships. Understanding Arabs constitutes a kind of cross-cultural handbook. Succinct and written in simple, straightforward prose, it sheds light on those aspects of culture and thought which most critically affect cross-cultural interaction and suggest ways Westerners can be more effective in dealing with the Arabs they encounter. Understanding Arabs is a rich resource for those who wish to better comprehend what they read and hear in the media and an invaluable guide for people who interact directly with Arabs and wish to do so with greater skill and understanding. Understanding Arabs is a perfect introduction into contemporary

Arab-Western relations for both students of American middle-east policies, and the non-specialist general reader with an interest in the understanding the background to today's national headlines and issues. -- Midwest Book Review --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Margaret Nydell is an experienced trainer and highly esteemed Arabist. She has directed Arabic language training at the Foreign Service Institute and its School of Arabic Language and Area Studies in Tunis. She currently teaches Arabic at Georgetown University and consults with public and private organisations.

If you are interested in culture, and want to know a little more about middle eastern people, this is a great book. Bridget Murphy

An American supervisor in Tunisia reprimands a local employee for habitually arriving late for work, and does so in front of the Tunisian's subordinates. To which the employee replies in anger, "I am from a good family! I know myself and my position in society!" To which, no doubt, most Americans would respond with incredulity: who's talking about family or social status? But to Nydell, an Arabic language specialist with long experience in the Middle East, there's no mystery: the Tunisian felt his honor had been threatened and was not at all concerned with addressing the issue at hand. Much in this fine survey of Arab mores will surprise the novice; old hands might find explanations for recognizable but somewhat inscrutable patterns. Some highlights: Doing favors is much more a part of friendship among Arabs than Westerners. A good personal relationship is the most important single factor in doing business successfully with Arabs. To Arabs, honor is more important than facts. People are more important than rules. Good manners are the most salient factor in evaluating character. Nydell rightly points out that Westerners resident in Arab countries automatically belong to the upper class, with all the benefits (social prestige) and obligations (good grooming, no manual work in public) that that implies. Family loyalty and obligations take precedence over loyalty to friends or the demands of a job. Nothing path-breaking here, but true and useful insights. Middle East Quarterly, June 1997

Interest has suddenly peaked, reviews are more numerous, and I want to say something about how the book is intended. It is a handbook, not a scholarly academic product, written to help people with personal interactions, and to explain differences and reasons for differences. I made every effort to have many Arabs and Muslims read it, checking for anything false or negative, and by this time, to my knowledge, everybody approves. I urge Arab readers not to assume that this is yet another negative evaluation of their society and culture. I speak Arabic, and collected information over the years from many people who do not speak English; I traveled and lived in the Arab World for over thirty years. The publisher gave the book its title; it does sound Orientalist, how "we" understand "the Arabs," but... I keep looking for anything in Arabic written by an Arab to help Arabs/Muslims/Mideasterners understand some of the behavior they observe in the West ("Understanding Americans/ Understanding Westerners"). I have never heard of anything like this, to date. There are so many misperceptions on both sides, we need anything we can find to explain, explain, explain. I welcome any comments about points which readers think need to be changed or modified, added or subtracted. My entire career has been devoted to writing Arabic-language materials, and directing Arabic-language classes, hoping to get as many Westerners as possible interested in the Arabic language and the Arab way of life. I hope there is nothing in the book that can be taken as gratuitous criticism or a value judgment as to whose way is better in any aspect. Having lived among Arabs my entire adult life, I do not think it impossible to have a genuine feeling for both Arabs and Westerners, how both groups think, live, what they care about, what they believe. We certainly need mutual understanding right now -- too many people are forming conclusions based on very wrong perceptions.

The title of this book could easily be changed to "Appreciating the Culture of Arabs." I have never been to an Arab country and before reading this book had no interest in going to one. Now I hope very much to get the chance to visit one some day. I read this book mostly because I wanted a better understanding of a part of the world that is not being adequately explained in the Western popular press. The book makes generalizations, but I don't know how anyone could attempt to describe the behavior patterns and values of 150 million different people in less than 150 pages without doing so. I, like most Americans, am abysmally ignorant of Middle Eastern cultures. How many Americans know, for example, that polygamy is illegal in Iraq, that job opportunities for women are much better in Iraq than in the Arabian Peninsula, and that the Koran does not prescribe that women wear veils? I didn't know these and many other basic things about this vitally important region of the world until I read this book. The generalizations made in the book are ones that make

me want to become acquainted with Arabs. The values the author says people in the Middle East place on piety, friendships, and family are ones that I share. I am sure the next time I meet an Arab I will be much more likely to want to become his friend. With the very general impression of the peoples of the Middle East provided by Dr Nydell, I am inspired to read a more in-depth study. This simple book has whet my appetite and given me a hunger to learn more about Arabic speaking people.

Margaret K. Nydell has recast this cross-cultural guide to getting along with Arabs in a new light in the midst of the war on terror. In so doing, she navigates sensitive territory, a no-man's land stuck between understanding another culture, and becoming an apologist for its negative behaviors. Properly executed, cross-cultural guides enhance one's awareness of the vast cultural gap between social norms and customs. Occasionally this volume lapses into cultural generalities, but that's inevitable when you're trying to explain norms of some 20 diverse Arab countries. Understanding Arabs will help you do just that, and although it may not shed a lot of light on the current conflict, it's very timely. We from getAbstract highly recommend it to anyone who wants a better understanding of Islam and Arabs. As Nydell says in her introduction, seeking understanding should not be confused with appeasement.

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