

I am a Copt

Occasionally I am asked about my nationality. I love watching the stunned expression on people's faces when I tell that I am not a Latina but in fact an Egyptian. Naturally they assume that I am a Muslim. At this point, it is even more entertaining to tell them that I am a Copt. Some people look at me as if I just said I belonged to a cult. There have actually been times when I have been asked if I was in a cult. Others who have studied the Copts are usually fascinated to meet a real live Coptic person. There are also those who have never heard of the Coptic people and have no interest in knowing about them, and that is where I believe the Copts' biggest problem lies.

When you first look at me or any of my Coptic friends, you can't distinguish us from our Muslim friends. Culturally we are almost the same. We listen to the same music, go the same places, eat the same food and speak the same language. Yet, there is a significant difference which separates us from other Egyptians. We are Christians. Not only are we Christians, we are Coptic, the indigenous people of Egypt. Making up about 10% of the country, the Coptic population is decreasing as people flee the country, convert to Islam or are killed due to religious persecution.

My family was among the many who came to America not only for a better life but for a chance to live and worship without fear. I, like, many of my peers grew up unaware of the injustices that were occurring in Egypt by fundamentalists, not only to the Copts but to those who do not agree with their ideology. This isn't because no one cares, but because not many people know. Those under oppression living in Egypt are understandably afraid to speak out living in a predominately Islamic land with an Islamic government. Those who are here are also afraid to speak out lest their families in Egypt are harmed or even in extreme circumstances they are attacked here in America. So not only are we an oppressed minority, the world doesn't even know who we are or that we are suffering these injustices on a daily basis.

I love my country and am proud of my heritage, especially being of Coptic descent. Living in a melting pot here in America has made me appreciate other cultures and races. This diversity is something that I value and cannot imagine living without. I wish that one day my country will be united as one in a manner of acceptance and tolerance of other beliefs. In the meantime those of us who have the power and ability to speak out on behalf of oppressed peoples all over the world should take a stand.