

UC SANTA BARBARA

# THE *Current*

May 14, 2024

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## **‘The Citizen’ examines the immigrant experience in a post-9/11 world — with echoes that resonate today**

Inspired by true events, Sam Kadi’s award-winning 2013 feature debut, “The Citizen,” provides a gripping commentary on the sociopolitical landscape of the United States and the everyday struggles of Arab-Americans after 9/11. The film follows Ibrahim Jarrah, an Arab immigrant who wins the green card lottery and arrives in New York City on Sept. 10, 2001 seeking refuge, opportunity and a better life. The next morning, everything changes.

In the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, Ibrahim confronts an America transformed, encountering virulent discrimination, prejudice and xenophobia. But even in the midst of these struggles, Ibrahim manages to forge important bonds with his new neighbors, finding a community that reshapes his visions of the American Dream.

A decade after its release, the *film’s* examination of the immigrant experience in a post-9/11 world and its engagement with questions of racial identity, belonging and community in the worst of times remains prescient.

As part of their series “Storytelling for the Screen,” UC Santa Barbara’s Carsey-Wolf Center on Tuesday, May 14 screened “[The Citizen](#)” and hosted a discussion with writer/director Kadi, actors William Atherton and Rizwan Manji and Juan Campo, a professor of religious studies.

In advance of the screening, Kadi, who is based in Santa Barbara, spoke with The Current about his film.

The Current: What drove you to tell this particular story?

Sam Kadi: I wanted to offer a fresh perspective, presented through the eyes of an immigrant, for the impact that the horrific events of 9/11 left on minorities — and on immigrants in general. I wanted these people to have a representation on the big screen, and for their struggles, challenges and love of America to be featured and discussed. This film is as much a reminder about what made us great as a nation as it is a love letter to the country that made me the person I am today.

TC: What do you hope viewers of the film learn from Ibrahim and his experience?

SK: I wanted the viewers to be entertained and intrigued enough to have a meaningful discussion. Ibrahim's journey in the film is just one of so many inspiring immigrant stories that speak to us on so many levels. Ibrahim fought hard for his dreams and beliefs, and — through kindness and understanding — he managed to build a small community that became his support system. It's understanding and a sense of community that we all need to strive for to survive bigotry and extremism. As an American myself, I feel that one of our main issues in this country is acceptance and understanding of each other. I hope this film helps us realize that humans have way more in common than differences, and the common ground that we all need to meet at is always available and up for grabs.

TC: In what ways do you see themes from The Citizen resonating still today?

SK: Unfortunately, in so many ways. It's hard to believe that a film that was made 10 years ago to address critical issues then is now as topical as ever. Xenophobia, racism, constitutional issues, immigration and the American Dream are all things that we touched on in the film when we started writing the script back in 2008. And now these issues are again extremely hot and challenging because of the distorted political climate that we live in. It might be a difficult discussion, but it's one that we must have.

The event is free but [reservations](#) are recommended to guarantee a seat.

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The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.