Engl 352: Arab American Literature

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**Section I: 50%**

**Choose 6 of the quotes below**. Discuss each quote in at least 200 words. I expect that you do three things in your discussion: first, make sure that you pay attention to specific details from the quote (do a close reading); second, discuss the quote in relation to some general theme or point about the work as a whole; third, mention another work where this theme or a similar one is treated similarly, contrastingly, or just differently. Length: at least 200 words.

One:

In America, I fit, but I don’t belong.

In Lebanon, I belong but I do not fit.

Two:

I smile at the midwestern women

As if my grandmother has just said something lovely about them

And shrug at my grandmother as if they

Had just apologized through me

No one is fooled, but I

Hold the door open for everyone

And we all emerge on the sales floor

And lose ourselves in the great common ground

Of housewares on markdown.

Three:

I was impatient and was about to interrupt him to plead for a postponement, when, looking about, I saw perhaps a dozen other figures, shepherds and fellaheen in the fields and pastures, all fallen in the same attitude or reverence and devotion. I could not disturb them. So presently I amused myself trying to picture a Moslem America. I saw fast trains coming to a stop out in the country, after which the engineer leaped from cab and spread his rug on the right of way, followed by all the Mohammedan members of the crew ad all the Mohammedan passengers. …Presently the Moslim finished his prayers, picked up his rug, and climbed into the car. His face was filled with an indescribable serenity and peace. I wouldn’t have robbed him of that bliss for anything.

Four:

From his transcendental height, the superman of America shall ray forth in every direction the divine light, which shall mellow and purify the spirit of Nations and strengthen and sweeten the spirit of men, in this New World, I tell you, he shall be born, but he shall not be an American in the Democratic sense. He shall be nor of the Old World nor of the New; he shall be, my Brothers, of both. In him shall be reincarnated the Asiatic spirit of origination, of Poesy and Prophecy, and the European sprite of Art, and the American spirit of Invention. Ay, the Nation that leads the world to-day in material progress shall lead it, too, in the future, in the higher things of the mind and soul.

Five**:**

Marcus wanted to stop Jassim, to say that he was sorry and this was all a giant misunderstanding, but he could not. He had no words to offer. And so he watched Jassim walk down the hall, watched as as Corey followed him out, made sure he was going directly to his car.

And his eyes rested on the top artivle: “Engineering Mistakes in the Building of the Twin Towers.”

Six**:**

My body is not your battleground

My hair is neither sacred nor heap,

Neither the cause of your disarray

Nor the path to your liberation

……

Untangle your hands from my hair

So I can comb and delight in it.

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Seven**:**

If they say you're not American,  
don't pull out your personal,  
wallet-sized flag. Instead, recall

the Bill of Rights. Mention the Constitution.  
Wear democracy like a favorite garment:  
comfortable, intimate.

If they wave newspapers in your face and shout,  
stay calm. Remember everything they never learned.  
Offer to take them to the library.

Eight:

In these moments of social exchange, the illusion of similarity between me and the girls in my class floated away, bubble light. Despite sharing the same school uniform, being in the Brownies, singing soprano in the choir, and being a good speller, my life and theirs were separated by the magic door. And although my classmates didn't know what was behind that portal, they circled me in the playground and shouted "darkie" at my braids trying to explode into a kinky mop, or "ape" at my arms bearing mahogany hair against my olive pale skin. It was dizzying and my stomach squirrel-squealed in loneliness.

Nine:

My uncle wore a white shirt every day of his life.

He raised his hand against the roaring ocean

and the television full of lies.

He shook his head back and forth

from one country to the other

and his ticket grew longer.

Immigrants had double and nothing all at once.

Immigrants drove the taxis, sold the beer and Cokes.

…..

His eyes roamed the couples at other booths,

their loose banter and casual clothes.

But he never became them.

Ten:

outside the house my practice  
is not to respond to remarks  
about my nose or the color of my skin.  
"Sand nigger," I'm called,  
and the name fits: I am  
the light-skinned nigger  
with black eyes and the look  
difficult to figure--a look  
of indifference, a look to kill--  
a Levantine nigger

**Essay topics**: 50%

Choose **Three** of the topics below. For each write a formal essay that is between 900-1200 words. Double-space and proofread carefully. If you’ve written on any of these topics for your midterm and you still would like to write about them here, make sure to use other primary works to discuss. Choose a range of works (minimum 3, different genres) to help you formulate a complex and nuanced thesis. Note that these are broad topics. You still need to narrow them down to have an argument.

2) Write an essay on the ways Arab American writers respond to orientalist representations of Arabs and Muslims. What strategies do they use? Which ones are effective, which ones are less so?

5) How does the form (narrative voice, structure, language etc) of *The Book of Khalid* and *Koolaids* relate to some of the themes in these two books.

6) In one of her poems, Suhair Hammad writes, “Over there is over here.” Write an essay showing how this idea is treated by some Arab-American writers.