

### English 316M: American Literature Exam III

1. This quote is taken from Sui Sin Far's *In the Land of the Free*, a short book that emphasizes themes of racism, especially when it is happening unconsciously. This quote in particular refers to the beginning of the story when the family arrives in San Francisco, and the customs officer does not allow the child to go on with his parents because he did not have the proper documentation. Despite being written over 100 years ago, in a lot of ways this story alludes to the migrant camps and the migrant children being separated from their parents that was happening under the Trump administration. After nearly 1 year of separation, the parents are finally able to see their child and the child does not even recognize the mother. This emotional story could be used as a powerful political piece to show that nothing has really changed in 100 years since it was written.

3. This quote is taken from Anzia Yezierska's novel *America and I*, a novel that, similar to Far's story, emphasizes the racism and hardships that one must face in the process of becoming an American. The quote that I am writing about for this prompt uses a lot of beautiful language and examples to show why exactly she finds difficulty in assimilating to American culture. For example, Yezierska states that she had "no speech, no common language, and no way to win a smile of understanding from them." My personal interpretation of this is that it hits me on a personal level, because my father emigrated to America in 1990 with almost no knowledge of the English language and to this day, despite having a Master's degree and a great job, does not feel 100% assimilated into American culture and still stands out as an immigrant. Despite this, over time, both Yezierska and my father have felt closer and closer to becoming an American over the duration of their lives.

4. This quote is taken from Gertrude Bonnin's poem *The School Days of an Indian Girl*, this poem, like the other prompts I have answered, also uses themes of someone coming from a different culture and trying to assimilate into American culture. In this particular quote, the author is referring to her difficulty in not knowing whether she belongs to the white culture she goes to school with, or the Native American culture that she was raised around. While the last prompt hit me on a personal level because it sounded like my family, this one is even more so personal because it sounds exactly like me. Growing up in a household of Lebanese immigrants, and then having to code switch every single day when I go to school was something that has always come natural to me. Unfortunately, as I get older and feel like I want to belong to a particular crowd, this has become increasingly difficult. White Americans tell me I have a slight Arabic accent when I speak English, and Arabs tell me I have an American accent when I speak Arabic.

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## Essay Portion: Prompt 2

In Ling Ma's novel *Severance*, the protagonist Candace leaves her hometown of New York on a journey to Chicago to avoid an outbreak of a disease. At the beginning of the novel, in New York, Candace is in a state of distress because of her recently breaking up with her boyfriend. As the disease starts to infect everybody, she also finds out that she is pregnant with the child of her now-ex boyfriend.

Because of Candace's job affiliation with making bibles in China, there are a lot of biblical allusions that can be found in the story. I cannot remember exact quotes but the general idea of the story can draw many parallels to biblical concepts such as rapture and the end of the world. For example, in *Severance* the world, at least within New York, feels like it's ending and only a select few people are able to survive the disease and escape. This could be drawn parallel to the biblical idea that when the "Rapture" happens those who believe in Christianity will disappear and be sent to heaven, whereas the nonbelievers will be left behind to suffer. In terms of an analogy, that would basically be saying that Candace and the group she escaped with are the believers in Christ who survived, whereas the people getting infected by the disease who are stuck in New York are the nonbelievers who are sentenced to eternal suffering.

As Candace goes through the escape plan with her group, she soon realizes that she does not want to be a part of this group. Especially after Candace arrives in Chicago, she wants to stick to a particular path because it is what feels familiar to her. Whereas the group, especially Bob, who had been making her feel uncomfortable anyways, want to take different paths. This may be a reach, but my interpretation of Candace feeling stuck to this group with Bob despite no longer wanting to be a part of it, is that it is drawing in analogy to extremist biblical cults, such as the Branch Davidians or something of the sort.

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## Extra Credit

**Chinese Exclusion Act:** Relating back to the identification portion of this essay and the fact that all 3 of the ones I defined had something to do with immigration, racism and assimilation, I felt that the Chinese Exclusion Act was the most appropriate one to talk about. The Chinese Exclusion Act was something that happened in the late 19th century that essentially prohibited Chinese immigrants from entering America, especially those with "low-skill" jobs. This law was shocking for its time because before it, America was known to be the country that accepted any and all emigrants from everywhere! My interpretation of the Chinese Exclusion

Act is that unfortunately, in a lot of ways, this law paved the way for the harsh immigration laws that can be found today, and it set a bad precedent for the future of America's acceptance of immigrants and refugees.