**First Year Writing**

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**ABDUL: The Inventor of Apple**

One day, I was walking to class through the crowds of people rushing

about their daily lives in the busy streets of Philadelphia. I stumbled across an

interesting sticker on a SEPTA bus sign that simply read, “Abdul Latif Jandali.”

Honestly, the first thing that crossed my mind was, “Is that a sticker with a pair

of boobs on it?” From a far glance, that is what it looked like. I came to find out,

at a closer look, that it was an odd balloon animation of a man with glasses.

Being Syrian myself, I could recognize the last name. I felt I had to dig deeper

into this because I was intrigued by the possibility that I might find something,

or someone, related to me.

I went on my phone and searched, “Abdul Drexel.” Nothing. I tried again

and searched, “balloon Abdul.” Bingo. This led me to an account named, “@

balloon.jobs” on Instagram that is run by an eccentric Algerian woman named

Riham Dib. I immediately reached out to her through direct message and we

got to know one another. In the message Riham sent that struck me the most,

she described the discrimination she and her family faced as immigrants

from Algeria in 2003. She described her first few months in America as “scary

and unsafe” and recalled acts of Islamophobia against her mother, stating,

“There was a lot of drunk harassment towards her because of her headscarf.

Men outside of bars would try to rip my mother’s hijab off as we walked past.”

Coming to the U.S. in 2003 was not an ideal time for Muslim immigrants because

it was just two years after 9/11. After reading this, I saw these encounters as fuel

to the fire for a strong Muslim woman on a mission to promote equality. The

more I spoke with her, the more fascinated I became. wanted to get to know her

personality. Riham’s outlook on life is one of the most notable aspects about

her. She also has the confidence to speak out whenever she sees any type of

discrimination, or something unfair happening. Conveniently enough, she

attends Drexel as a graphic design major in Westphal; however, her current

focus is a documentary about a man named Abdul. After learning more about

her current work, I knew that I wanted to profile Riham and her documentary.

The real question is, who is Abdul?

Soon after, I asked her if she was willing to meet up at Westphal to talk more

about her passion for this documentary in person. I wanted to hear the story

raw from Riham herself. I was in for a treat when I met a five-foot-tall girl who

had afro-style hair, looked as if she had been electrocuted, bleached eyebrows,

and henna-dipped brown fingertips. *This* was a character if I’d ever seen one,

and her story on Abdul was just as peculiar as her. As a Muslim woman, I feel as

though there is a matter of discrimination in society today. This discrimination

is evidenced by the fact that people of color are less valued, compared to white

Americans. Their contribution to society is often overlooked compared to their

white counterparts. This matter is very important and needs to be recognized.

That is why I feel very strongly about Riham, another Muslim woman, and her

vision for this documentary: to bring to light our culture and prove that we are

innovators, creators, and just as revolutionary as the white man.

Abdul Latif Jandali is the full birth name of Steve Jobs. Yes, *the* Steve Jobs

that made the phone or computer you are likely using right now to read this

profile. You may be wondering, how is it possible that a white man has such

a classic Arabic name? The answer is because Steve Jobs is indeed Syrian.

Steven Paul Jobs was born to Abdulfattah Jandali and Joanne Schieble but

was later put up for adoption and adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs. According

to Steve’s uncle, “Abdulfattah had a baby boy out of wedlock with an American

woman, Joanne, and they gave him up for adoption. Abdulfattah could not

return to Syria because of this ‘scandal’” (Jandaly).

We know the extent of Steve’s Syrian decent from specific accounts by his

uncle stating, “Abdulfattah John Jandali belongs to a prominent Sunni family

from Homs. The family is a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammad”

(Jandaly). Riham focuses on the idea of his name because it is essential to

determining how a name defines a person and can alter one’s career path.

His name is a clear determinant of his race. With that being said, the question

Riham wants to answer is based on whether people would have taken Steve

Jobs seriously if he was not labeled as a white man but rather, a Syrian man.

A person’s name can influence the way the public will view them if their

race can be inferred based upon their name. The general consensus is that

people have already made their judgement on someone just by seeing their

name. In a study conducted by two economists from Stockholm University,

they found that, “immigrants had changed their Slavic, Asian, or African names,

such as Kovacevic and Mohammed, to more Swedish-sounding, or neutral

ones, like Lindberg and Johnson” (Konnikova). Immigrants change their birth

names to white-washed versions in order to gain an advantage in financial

areas. The two economists further explained this in the study by stating, “This

kind of name change substantially improved earnings: the immigrants with

new names made an average of twenty-six per cent more than those who chose

to keep their names” (Konnikova). This is a clear representation of the public’s

discriminatory mindset.

Based on current stories surfacing in the media, it is possible that the

public would not have taken Abdul Latif Jandali seriously when he went public

with the Macintosh. He could have been slapped with the label “terrorist,”

and his dream of the Macintosh may have never been realized. Or, Americans

may have become scared of Abdul, proclaiming him to be too smart for an

immigrant Arab man, ultimately becoming a danger to society. Some questions

Riham wanted to answer were: “Would anyone even buy his products? Would

we have Apple today? Would people have listened and taken him seriously?”

She hopes to find answers to these questions by conducting random, in-person

questionnaires with everyday people on the streets of Philadelphia. *ABDUL* is

far from finished though. Riham could not give an estimate on how far along

she is but claims the documentary is a long-term project she will continually

work on for life. Riham explains that her goal is to finish the initial documentary

next year as part of her senior thesis project. She anticipates public viewings in

galleries only in countries and cities where Syrian refugees are welcome, such

as Istanbul, Turkey.

As I interviewed Riham, she explained to me how this idea came about,

stating, “I’m not sure why I was looking up Apple, but I was really into Steve

Jobs at the time and I stumbled upon his wiki page. On the side bar, where you

have the picture, the name, date of birth, etc. I saw his real birth name listed as

Abdul Latif Jandali.” Riham then explained how she was shocked to find this

as his name and initially laughed, “I thought it was a joke.” She remembers

her parents, “murmuring about him being Syrian, but I never paid attention

to it.” This threw her down a rabbit hole, researching “day and night” to find

his roots and any documentation she could about Jobs and his biological

parents’ early lives. Riham also began researching studies on the psychological

science of the impact of names. When I investigated these studies myself, I was

very impressed to find research specifically tailored to the effect of Arabic

immigrant names, and overall, proves xenophobia using science.

During this interview, Riham showed me all the propaganda stickers she

was working on, including the one that originally led me to her. She also showed

me a clip of her documentary, in which she hired a professional balloon artist to

make a life-sized version of Jobs holding an Apple in his hand. She then carried

the creation around all of Philadelphia, asking locals if they knew his name. The

only answer she got was Steve Jobs, but she is working to change that with her

documentary, *ABDUL*.

Works Cited

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