

Arabic 367: American Identity in the World
Arab-American Family Immigration Sagas
Winter Quarter, 2007
Professor Sabra Jean Webber

There are times when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one perceives, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. —Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

Personal narrative mediates [the] contradiction between the engagement called for in fieldwork and the self-effacement called for in formal ethnographic description, or at least it mitigates some of its anguish by inserting into the text the authority of the personal experience out of which ethnography is made. —Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places”

M-W 10:30-12:18

CZ 0168

Section LR, Call # 01667-9

Mailboxes: Hagerty Hall 300 or
Hagerty Hall 451

Office:

Office Hours:

E mail Hours:

Email:

Hagerty Hall 314

M 9-10, W 4-5

M 8-9 p.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this second writing course, you will study personal experience narratives and record Arab-American family immigration sagas as a “way into” both improving writing skills and coming to better understand facets of “the” Arab American immigrant experience as it has developed over more than a century. Drawing from lectures, film, music, literature and ethnography, we will think not so much about how Arab-Americans are represented as how they represent themselves. We will especially consider loci where cultures collide and the kinds of interventions writers and filmmakers make at those times. We will attend to such situations via visual as well as written representations. Where might the visual make sense of or challenge aspects of the inter-cultural? A major project for the course will be the video recording of an immigration saga that you have elicited yourself from an Arab American immigrant or his or her descendants and a paper you have been developing over the quarter that will study your saga both as literature and as a “model” for the stories that immigrants, in this case Arab-American immigrants, tell themselves and others about themselves. Why does your informant present the story as s/he does? Much of your writing will be owned by you in that, with my feedback and that of your classmates, you will do fieldwork and library research, and write extensively on a topic of your choosing (as well as write on shorter topics of my choosing). Each of you will contribute to others’ projects (and get feedback on your own) by sharing insights, experiences, writing, and film with the class.

In addition to broader writing skills, we will regularly address issues of writing—punctuation, sentence structure, style, documentation of sources, and overall essay structure. At least once a week, we’ll have a “writing moment” during which we field questions about general writing issues or cover a specific writing strategy/topic related to one of the readings (perhaps on style or structure) or one of your current writing assignments.

COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- A folder in which to keep all of your writing
- A Journal for class notes, reading notes, drafts.

-Texts: All texts are available exclusively at SBX (Student Book Exchange) on High Street across from the student union.

Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry (Orfalea and Elmusa, eds.)
All American Yemeni Girls
Writing with Style
Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction (Kaldas and Mattawa eds.)

-Films: *Persons of Interest*, *Tales from Arab Detroit*, *Being Osama*, *In my Own Skin*, *Benaat Chicago*, *Caught in the Crossfire*, *Edward Said: Final Interview*.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Attendance is required. Reading and writing assignments should be completed well before the start of class so that no printer or computer crisis will interfere with your ability to submit your paper. Please arrive on time. Grades for class participation are judged by your active listening, looking, watching (of films) questioning, commenting, and note taking\journaling. Since we have fewer than 20 times to meet during the quarter, we expect everyone to show up every time. *I am assuming that you are taking the course on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons because it is a good time for you. If it is not, please select another section of 367.*

There are seven writing assignments that will over the quarter build your final paper and videotape. You must complete all of the writing assignments in order to pass this course. Please do not submit any papers, except your reading and film responses, by e-mail.

Many creative writers find collaboration with kindred spirits a helpful part of the writing process. Peer groups numbering four to five students will be assigned by me. As a member of a peer group, you will be required to read and respond to your peers' writing, and attend your peer group meeting.

Reading Responses: In addition, for each week's reading, you will write a one-page (at least) response to the reading in preparation for class discussion and, of course, as part of your writing practice. These should be critical (thoughtful) responses and make use of standard writing conventions (paragraphs, punctuation, and clear sentence structure). I will provide you specific questions to which you should respond. (And, if you are really inspired by something in the reading I haven't asked about, you may write on that instead.) These writings will be graded on a 5 point scale (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest); you may revise each only one time, within a week of its return to you. **These writings are due in via Carmen (Carmen.osu.edu) by 9:00 p.m. the day before they are due in class.** Nothing late will be accepted so better to get it in early to avoid last minute complications.

Revision: I strongly encourage you to revise your writing assignments, any of them, and will average the two grades. Reader feedback, knowledge gained, a new perspective or insight

achieved—all these things (and more) can change the way we as writers approach a piece of writing. **Revisions are due one week after you receive your graded paper from me.** **Late assignments may not be revised.** It is better to turn in a not-so-hot paper than no paper at all. (If your essay is frustrating you, let it go and let me read it. *Then* revise.)

Journal Entries: Journal Entries consist of your notes from class plus thoughts on your final project and comments on and analysis of required readings and films. Much of this writing will be done in class. As mentioned above, these journals will be collected from time to time.

GRADING

The reading quizzes and writing assignments will be graded based on an A to E scale that includes pluses and minuses. As a rule, “A” work is excellent; “B” work is above average, which is to say “very good”; “C” work is acceptable; “D” work barely satisfies the objectives; and “E” is failing.

If you have any questions regarding the assignments, my expectations, or your progress, I encourage you to see me during my office hours or by appointment.

Final grades will be based on the following:

Reading Responses+Journals 20% Class/Group Participation 20%
Writing Assignments: Hard copies only—no e-mail or Carmen, please. 40%
Oral Presentation of Final Project (film and analysis) 20%

POLICIES

- **Assignments.** **You must complete ALL assignments in order to pass this course.** All assignments except the reading responses are due at the start of class on the dates indicated below unless other arrangements are approved by me *in advance*.
- **Attendance.** Because this class meets only twice a week, **attendance is required.** No exceptions. For each unexcused absence, your final grade will be lowered one grade (for example, from A to A-). If you accumulate ten or more unexcused absences, you will fail.
- **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. In other words, plagiarism may result in serious consequences. Therefore, do your own writing and cite ALL of your sources.
- **Student Work.** If you would like your final paper returned, hand it in with a self-address envelope or let me know by e-mail to leave it for you in the departmental office. I will not pitch anything for at least three quarters.

RESOURCES

iMovie training, Digital Union 370 Science & Engineering Library:

Wednesday, 6 February, 10:30-12:18

Wednesday 13 February, 10:30-12:18

The Writing Center, 485 Mendenhall Lab - The Writing Center staff can help students with writing—not only with writing strategies but also with approaches to specific assignments. <http://www.cohums.ohio-state.edu/cstw/writingcenter.htm> If you receive a three or less on one of your two first reading assignment responses, you must go to the writing center. They will let us know that you consulted them.

UTS, Equipment Loans - Video camcorders and audio recorders can be checked out without notice, and free of charge. Loans are based on availability; several working days advance notice is recommended. 11 Lord Hall: call 292-3131.

THIS SYLLABUS AND THE COURSE CAN BE ADJUSTED TO BETTER MEET YOUR NEEDS AND THAT OF THE CLASS AS A WHOLE AS I GET TO KNOW YOU DURING THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. SINCE EACH PERSON'S VIDEO PROJECT WILL BE DIFFERENT, WE WILL NEED TO BE IMAGINATIVE IN PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK CUSTOMIZED TO EACH FELLOW STUDENT.

NOTICE: ALWAYS BRING THE BOOK WE ARE CURRENTLY READING TO CLASS

Week I

-January 3

- Introductions, Syllabus, Q & A, Preconception Assessment (Arab-Americans) & Writing Assessment.
- What is a Personal Experience Narrative?
- Begin your own “immigration saga” in discussion with the professor and your class groups

January 5 Art and the American Immigrant Experience

-Film: *Tales from Arab Detroit* (45 minutes)

-Reading Due: xiii-xxix: *Grape Leaves*: “A Way of Thanking,” p. 282, “The Gentry” p. 283, “My Father and the Fig Tree,” 271-272, “Leaves,” p. 173, “Dying with the Wrong Name,” pp. 169-172, H.S. Hamod p. 163, “A Mixture of Sounds,” p. 164.

And: Chapter 13 of *Writing with Style*, “Quoting” and Chapter 12, “Punctuation.” (Thus, when you use those examples that I ask for in your reading responses, you will get them right.)

-Reading Response Assignment: From your lecture notes and notes you have taken in your journal and the poems due on January 5, post on Carmen (Carmen.osu.edu) by 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday a one or two page carefully written essay on how arts and material culture (music, poetry, dance, dress, painting, food ways, nature) help maintain connections among Arab Americans and Arabs, older and younger Arab Americans, Arab-American men and women. Be sure to use examples from the poems and other writings.

Be sure to follow the punctuation and quote advice in *Writing with Style*.

Reading Discussion Leaders for Jan 5 _____

Week II

-January 10 *Coming to Terms with Place: Betwixt and Between is/as a Place*

-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE DUE (refer to Writing Assignments on last page of syllabus for a final check.)

Reading/viewing response: Students exchange papers and discuss their responses as well as writing strategies for the in-class writing response.

-Reading Due: “A Mixture of Sounds,” p. 164, “After the Funeral of Assam Hamady,” p. 165, “Letters from Home,” pp. 285-6, Elmaz Abinader, p. 281, “For Lost and Found Brothers,” pp. 277-278, Naomi Shihab Nye p. 265.

-Reading Response: *In Class* Writing Assignment: For this assignment, prepare to address the artistic resources the poets in the reading assignment and the people in the film, *Tales from Arab Detroit* that we watched last week, can draw upon to help you understand the ways that they feel “betwixt and between” cultures. (Here, your notes on the readings you have made in your journal should be invaluable.)

We will also discuss in class possible informants for your family immigration saga. Be thinking of ideas ...

January 12 *Arab-Americans Post 9-11: Coping Strategies*

-Film: *Being Osama* (45 minutes) Discussion: In addition to the comments of the Osamas about their situations, how does the filmmaker help us quickly become acquainted with them? What sorts of techniques could you use in your film?

-Poem due: “first writing since.” (handout)

-Reading due: “It’s Not About That,” Samia Serageldin, “The Spiced Chicken Queen of Mickaweaguah, Iowa,” Muhja Kahf, “A Frame for the Sky,” Randa Jarrar, and “Introduction” In *Dinarzad’s Children* pp. ix-xiv, 31-42, 161-169, 137-154.

AND

Writing with Style, chapter 15 “Tips on Usage.”

Reading Discussion Leaders for Jan 12 _____

-Discussion of in-class writing assignment.

Week III

-January 16Reading Response Due By 9:00 p.m. January 16**:** From the notes in your journal, summarize the coping strategies represented in the film, *Being Osama*, the poem, “first writing since ...” and the short stories “It’s not about That,” “A Frame for the Sky,” and “The Spiced Chicken Queen.”

-January 17 *Art Talks Back: John Ashcroft, Persons of Interest (film) and Violence in the old homeland.*

Reading Due: Short Stories: “Oh Lebanon,” p.57, “Manar of Hama,” p. 129, “Edge of Rock,” p. 185 and poems, “The Bomb that Fell on Abdu’s Farm” and “Letters to Lebanon,” pp. 219-220.

Reading Discussion Leaders:_____

***Now is the time that you should be deciding on your informant for the family immigration saga and getting permissions.**

-January 19 *Documenting Discourse*

Week IV

Reading Response Due on Carmen, January 23 by 9:00 p.m.: How do the short story writers, the filmmaker and the filmed, the poets, “talk back” to John Ashcroft?

-January 24 *Embodying Identity*

Film: *In My Own Skin* (16 minutes)

Reading Due: *Writing with Style* Chapters 1 and 2 “Thinking Well” and “Getting Launched.”

Writing Due: Field Observations (Refer to Writing Assignments, final page of syllabus)

-January 26

Exchange of field observations, reading and discussions in small groups

Possible Visit to the Main Library

WEEK V: Videotape/Begin Continue to Search for Bibliography and Make Notes of Emerging Themes in Your Immigration Saga.

-January 31 *Producing America and Challenging Images*

-Film: *Caught in the Cross-Fire* (54 minutes)

-Reading Due: “The American Way,” “My Elizabeth,” “Lost in Freakin’ Youngers,” “Arabic Lessons.”

-Reading Discussion Leaders_____

February 1, 9 p.m. on Carmen: Reading Response Due: Find a unifying theme in how the authors of the short stories you read for Tuesday are challenging any kind of unifying or simplified or idealized portrayal of Arab American at the same time that *Caught in the Cross-Fire* plays to these portrayals. Is there a luxury in not “toeing the line” that Arab-Americans are deprived of? Why can this rule/role breaking happen more easily in fiction?

February 2 (tentative) Trip to Folklore Center: 1. Welcome and introductions.

2. Listen to field work tape by folklorist Sandy Ives 20-30 minutes.

3. Graduate student will address the students regarding Florence Minnis’ techniques for video-taping interviews

4. Talk by folklorist Barbara Lloyd about motifs that are found in oral histories and about the forms.

WEEK VI

-February 7

Reading: *All American Yemeni Girls* pages 12 (the hijaba)-58 and *Writing with Style*: Chapter 3.

Work on Revising Field Observations for Thursday

Reading Response due February 8, Due on Carmen 9:00 pm: What are four major “betwixt and between” issues that the Yemeni American girls wrestle with? Give an example of each from the experiences of the actual girls interviewed or mentioned in the book.

-February 9 *Reading Icons*

Film: *Benaat Chicago*

Reading: *All American Yemeni Girls* pages 59-83 and *Writing with Style* chapter 4

Submit Revised Field Observations

Reading Discussion Leaders _____

WEEK VII

Reading Response due on February 13 9:00 p.m. on Carmen: Compare your emerging themes with themes in the ethnography. Include all of *All American Yemeni Girls*

-February 14 *Reading Icons*

Film: *Benaat Chicago* (30 minutes)

Reading: *All American Yemeni Girls*--Finish and *Writing with Style*--Finish

Reading Discussion Leaders _____

-February 16

EMERGING THEMES DUE & Rough videotapes due. We will look portions of each in class.

WEEK VIII

-February 21 Remaining Videotapes Due: We will look at these in class.

Emerging Themes Paper Due: From these we will discuss possible bibliographic topics.

-February 23

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Individual Conferences with Webber or Bock. Sign ups.

WEEK IX:

-February 28-- FINAL PAPER, FIRST DRAFT, BRING 5 COPIES TO CLASS

Student Presentations Begin:

Note Time of Your Presentation _____

-March 2:

Note Time of Your Presentation _____

WEEK X

-March 7

Note Time of Your Presentation _____

-March 9

Note Time of Your Presentation _____

FINAL PAPER & Video due.

-March 10 (Friday, 5:00 p.m.)

Self-Reflection Paper Due in Office Mailbox

Writing Assignments

The overall aim of the writing assignments is to explore a wide range of academic conventions, styles, and purposes. All of the writing assignments must be typed in Times or a similar serif-style font, 12-point type, with one-inch margins on all four sides, headers and page numbers, and according to MLA or Chicago style.

- ❑ **READING RESPONSES** (one page, single-spaced, begun in class and polished at home,)
These may, and probably should, find some connection to your project. One per week.
- ❑ **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE** (two to three pages, double-spaced)
Transform your memory of a meaningful experience or situation into prose. Recreate the scene, represent the dialogue, and reflect on what happened.
- ❑ **FIELD OBSERVATIONS** (no page limit)
Describe what you saw, heard, and experienced. Map the space, explain the situation, characterize the participants, recount their interactions, and comment on your impressions.
- ❑ **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION and VIDEO** (no page limit)
Describe the context of the interview, characterize the interviewee, transcribe the tape recording, and discuss your impressions.
- ❑ **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY** (a minimum of five resources)
Collect, evaluate, and *annotate* documents (books, articles, websites, and other resource materials) related (both broadly and closely) to your research interest. Introduce the overall theme or direction of your bibliography, annotate each resource according to MLA style, and summarize your findings.
- ❑ **EMERGING THEMES** (minimum one page, single-spaced)
Synthesize your data. Describe the status of your research; discuss the patterns, connections, and anomalies, and comment on your impressions as well as any unanswered questions.
- ❑ **FINAL PAPER** (ten pages, double spaced, plus Works Cited)
- ❑ **SELF-REFLECTION** (minimum one page, single-spaced)
Reflect on the research process. Describe your project, discuss what happened, and compare what you “knew” at the outset to what you know now. (Your journals and first day preconception assessment should be useful here.)

Date: Fri, 28 Sep 2001 03:34:31 -0400

"first writing since"

1. there have been no words. i have not written one word. no poetry in the ashes south of canal street. no prose in the refrigerated trucks driving debris and dna. not one word.

today is a week, and seven is of heavens, gods, science. evident out my kitchen window is an abstract reality. sky where once was steel. smoke where once was flesh.

fire in the city air and i feared for my sister's life in a way never before. and then, and now, i fear for the rest of us.

first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the plane's engine died. then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now. please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone who looks like my brothers.

i do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill. i have never been so hungry that i willed hunger i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen. not really. even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being. never this broken.

more than ever, i believe there is no difference. the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the difference between indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus. more than ever, there is no difference.

2. thank you korea for kimchi and bibimbab, and corn tea and the genteel smiles of the wait staff at wonjo the smiles never revealing the heat of the food or how tired they must be working long midtown shifts. thank you korea, for the belly craving that brought me into the city late the night before and diverted my daily train ride into the world trade center.

there are plenty of thank yous in my right now. thank you for my lazy procrastinating late ass. thank you to the germs that had me call in sick. thank you, my attitude, you had me fired the week before. thank you for the train that never came, the rude nigger who stole my cab going downtown. Thank you for the sense my mama gave me to run. thank you for my legs, my eyes, my life.

3. the dead are called lost and their families hold up shaky printouts in

front of us through screens smoked up.

we are looking for iris, mother of three. please call with any information.

we are searching for priti, last seen on the 103rd floor. she was talking to her husband on the phone and the line went. please help us find george, also known as adel. his family is waiting for him with his favorite meal. I am looking for my son, who was delivering coffee. i am looking for my sister girl, she started her job on monday.

i am looking for peace. i am looking for mercy. i am looking for evidence of compassion. any evidence of life. i am looking for life.

4. ricardo on the radio said in his accent thick as yuca, "i will feel so much better when the first bombs drop over there. and my friends feel the same way."

on my block, a woman was crying in a car parked and stranded in hurt. i offered comfort, extended a hand she did not see before she said, "we're gonna burn them so bad, i swear, so bad." my hand went to my head and my head went to the numbers within it of the dead iraqi children, the dead in nicaragua. the dead in rwanda who had to vie with fake sport wrestling for america's attention.

yet when people sent emails saying, this was bound to happen, lets not forget u.s. transgressions, for half a second i felt resentful. hold up with that, cause i live here, these are my friends and fam, and it could have been me in those buildings, and we're not bad people, do not support america's bullying. can i just have a half second to feel bad?

if i can find through this exhaust people who were left behind to mourn and to resist mass murder, i might be alright.

thank you to the woman who saw me brinking my cool and blinking back tears.

she opened her arms before she asked "do you want a hug?" a big white woman, and her embrace was the kind only people with the warmth of flesh can offer. i wasn't about to say no to any comfort. "my brother's in the navy," i said. "and we're arabs". "wow, you got double trouble." word.

5. one more person ask me if i knew the hijackers. one more motherfucker ask me what navy my brother is in. one more person assume no arabs or muslims were killed. one more person assume they know me, or that i represent a people. or that a people represent an evil. or that evil is as simple as a flag and words on a page.

we did not vilify all white men when mcveigh bombed oklahoma. america did not give out his family's addresses or where he went to church. or blame the bible or pat robertson.

and when the networks air footage of palestinians dancing in the street, there is no apology that hungry children are bribed with sweets that turn their teeth brown. that correspondents edit images. that archives are here to facilitate lazy and inaccurate journalism.

and when we talk about holy books and hooded men and death, why do we never mention the kkk?

if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip.

6. today it is ten days. last night bush waged war on a man once openly funded by the cia. i do not know who is responsible. read too many books, know too many people to believe what i am told. i don't give a fuck about bin laden. his vision of the world does not include me or those i love. And petitions have been going around for years trying to get the u.s. sponsored taliban out of power. shit is complicated, and i don't know what to think.

but i know for sure who will pay.

in the world, it will be women, mostly colored and poor. women will have to bury children, and support themselves through grief. "either you are with us, or with the terrorists" - meaning keep your people under control and your resistance censored. meaning we got the loot and the nukes.

in america, it will be those amongst us who refuse blanket attacks on the shivering. those of us who work toward social justice, in support of civil liberties, in opposition to hateful foreign policies.

i have never felt less american and more new yorker, particularly brooklyn, than these past days. the stars and stripes on all these cars and apartment windows represent the dead as citizens first, not family members, not lovers.

i feel like my skin is real thin, and that my eyes are only going to get darker. the future holds little light.

my baby brother is a man now, and on alert, and praying five times a day that the orders he will take in a few days time are righteous and will not

weigh his soul down from the afterlife he deserves.

both my brothers - my heart stops when i try to pray - not a beat to disturb my fear. one a rock god, the other a sergeant, and both palestinian, practicing muslim, gentle men. both born in brooklyn and their faces are of the archetypal arab man, all eyelashes and nose and beautiful color and stubborn hair.

what will their lives be like now?

over there is over here.

7. all day, across the river, the smell of burning rubber and limbs floats through. the sirens have stopped now. the advertisers are back on the air. the rescue workers are traumatized. the skyline is brought back to human size. no longer taunting the gods with its height.

i have not cried at all while writing this. i cried when i saw those buildings collapse on themselves like a broken heart. i have never owned pain that needs to spread like that. and i cry daily that my brothers return to our mother safe and whole.

there is no poetry in this. there are causes and effects. there are symbols and ideologies. mad conspiracy here, and information we will never know. there is death here, and there are promises of more.

there is life here. anyone reading this is breathing, maybe hurting, but breathing for sure. and if there is any light to come, it will shine from the eyes of those who look for peace and justice after the rubble and rhetoric are cleared and the phoenix has risen.

affirm life. affirm life. we got to carry each other now. you are either with life, or against it. affirm life.

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