Jamal

I'm Palestinian by an accident of birth I had no control over. Somebody's American, it's an accident of birth. I'm not better than them, they're not better than me. Do we kill each other over these accidents? That's silly. We need to help each other, share, realize our common humanity.

I was born in Jerusalem, at the time when Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine. There is no country called Palestine anymore. It was essentially wiped off the map. At a very young age, my family became refugees. We lost everything and we moved to the city of Ramallah, which was on the West Bank and under Jordanian rule.

I came to the U.S. to study, and in the summer of '67 there was a war in the Middle East. Israel took over the West Bank, including where my family lives. I couldn't go home because I wasn't there at the time of the occupation. My passport said I was Jordanian, so I was denied a visa to go home. For many years I couldn't even visit.

I remained in the U.S. Originally I was staying with a friend in Houston, but soon I moved to Detroit. From there, I moved to Florida. I went to school during the day and I worked odd jobs at night. I was employed as a janitor when I received my

PhD from the University of Cincinnati – I'm proud of what I have done. I can't sing – I don't have the voice to sing – so I can just say, "I did it my way."

It has always been shocking and disappointing to me how Americans look down upon my people, my culture, and my whole civilization. Even at the college, when they were teaching about "world civilizations" it was essentially Europe – feudal landlords, and knights. What!? Hey, wake up! When Europe was in the Dark Ages, there was an Islamic Golden Age that contributed so much to humanity!

It's hard to comprehend the degree of ignorance in this country about Arabs. It has gotten better, no doubt. But there is still a great deal of ignorance. And lately there has been a revival of racism, where people are burning down mosques, or shooting people because they look Arab or Muslim, or even when they're Indian or Sikh. It's become the stereotype that Arabs are terrorists and violent people.
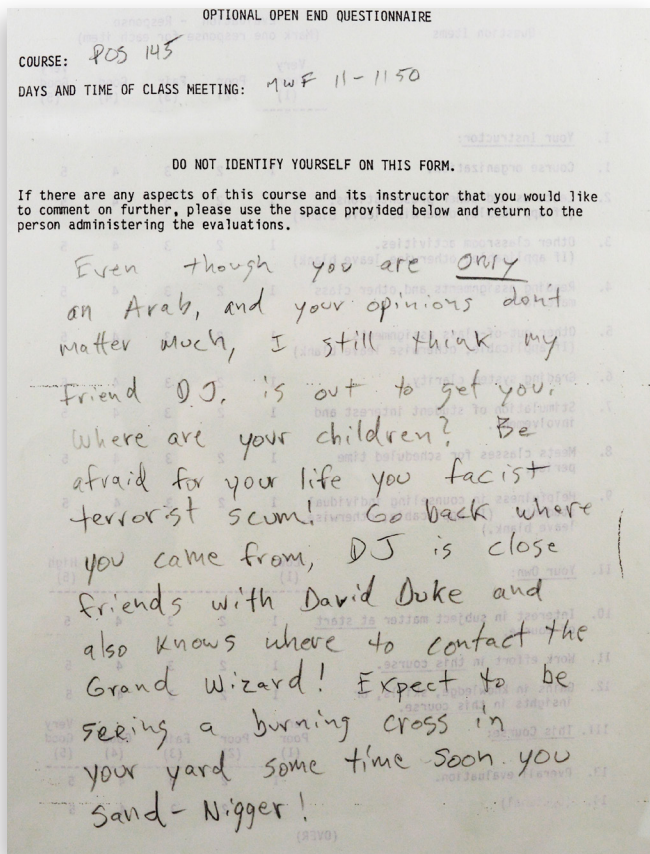
It's outrageous, really. When an American commits a terrorist act we call him "Timothy McVeigh." When a Muslim commits a terrorist act we call him "Islamic terrorist." We label one and a half billion Muslims in the world by the act of one. We don't say "Jewish terrorist." We don't say "Christian terrorist." We don't label the whole group. We know the name or we say "deranged man," and that's it. But Muslims don't get sick, I guess. Only Westerners get sick.

People also assume that because I have an

Even though you are only on Arab, and your opinions don't matter much, I still think my friend D.J. is out to get you. Where are your children? Be afraid for your life you facist terrorist scum! Go back where you came from, DJ is close friends with David Duke and also knows where to contact the Grand Wizard! Expect to be seeing a burning cross in your yard some time soon. you Sand-Nigger!

Hateful and discriminatory attitudes toward those of Arab descent have been a constant in Jamal's teaching career. He keeps this student evaluation as a reminder of his purpose.

"My Purpose is to advocate for justice. It is to advocate agaist bigotry, and against racism of any kind. That's the objective of my life – that struggle."

Arab name I must be Muslim, because all Arabs are Muslim. But I'm Roman Catholic. I even had a professor at Illinois State University one time stop me and say, "When did you convert to Christianity?" I was shocked. He taught comparative politics! I asked him, "Was Jesus Christ born in McLean County? Do you realize we started Christianity in Palestine?"

Working in the University system, I was also called many names over the years. They wrote on my office door, "Kill all Arabs." On numerous occasions I got to the classroom and there was something nasty written on the blackboard. They slashed the tires on my car, too. Maybe it's because I'm vocal. Maybe it's because I'm Arab, or Palestinian, or whatever.

And then when September 11th happened, that was a very scary time. The police department circled around my house, to protect me, because they feared that I might be attacked. Many friends called and offered that I go and stay with them until things calmed down,

and so on. But I didn't. I wasn't about to let bigots or idiots drive me out of my own house. That's my home, my family's home. I left once, from Jerusalem, and I was never able to get back. I don't leave my home anymore.

The way I see things going is very disheartening. I see us going backward, rather than moving forward to bring about greater equity and justice around the world. I see that refugees are getting a bad rap. I mean, the reason for them to become refugees is they're being bombed! When bombs fall from the sky you try to run away, take your family, and move to some place safe. Instead of welcoming them we're saying no, shutting the doors, and canceling visas. These people are in desperate need. And in the long run these refugees would make tremendous contributions to our society.

Liberty, freedom, give me your poor, give me your hungry. That's the United States I believe in.