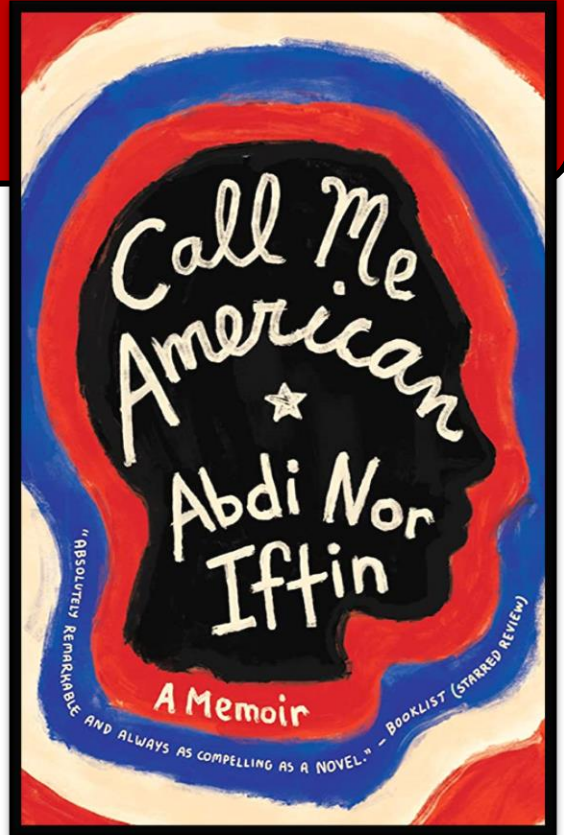


The Otterbein Common Book 2023



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About the Common Book Author



Otterbein’s Common Book Program, one of the University’s signature programs, offers a shared reading experience for all incoming first-year students, and for faculty, staff, and other members of the Otterbein community.

The 2023 Common Book, *Call Me American*, is a testament to courage, survival, and determination. In this memoir, Abdi Nor Iftin describes his love affair with American popular culture, his life in war-torn Somalia, his plight as a refugee in the Horn of Africa, and his miraculous, desperate immigration to the United States.

Call Me American is a meditation on intercultural exchange, the power of words to shape lives, and the human capacity for endurance. Yet, it focuses not just on the everyday suffering in a country whose history has been marred by colonialism and war, but reminds us of those moments of joy amidst pain. *Call Me American* testifies to the power of supporting one another and making sacrifices for the betterment of our fellow humans. It embodies a dream of freedom and a better life—a dream of America.

Common Book Assignment

Respond to this prompt in a thesis-driven essay consisting of multiple paragraphs:

Call Me American details two major struggles, each occupying about half of the book: first, Ifitin's struggle for survival in Somalia as the Somali Civil War breaks out, and second, his battle to escape Somalia as a refugee and ultimately assimilate into American culture. Which of these experiences was more impactful to you? Which of Ifitin's struggles resonated with your own as you read the book? Based on Ifitin's experiences, what are some things you take for granted in the United States, and what did those things look like in *Call Me American*?

Rubric

A well-written essay will demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. The introduction effectively identifies and contextualizes the book and engages the reader.
2. The thesis statement presents the main idea of the essay.
3. The essay deploys complete paragraph structure, which means each paragraph has a clear topic sentence which ties the idea to the thesis, and each topic sentence is defended by relevant and appropriate supporting evidence from the book.
4. The essay is an analysis, not merely a summary. This means that the essay uses reasoning to support its thesis, and that the organization and structure aid the writer in developing their ideas logically and with appropriate and effective connections between them.
5. Supporting details from the book demonstrate the writer's ability with the different forms of reporting (summary, paraphrase, and at least 3 direct quotations).
6. Quotations are chosen carefully and judiciously, appropriately introduced and punctuated, and correctly cited according to MLA guidelines.
7. The Work Cited entry is complete and correct.
8. Sentences are varied in length and structure, and demonstrate the author's mastery of Academic English syntax.
9. Writing is economical; word choice is precise.
10. The writer is consistent in tense, number, and person. Mechanics, usage, and grammar are standard. The essay has been carefully proofread prior to submission.

Document Design

Essays submitted to your professors should be written according to a standard format: font, spacing, margins, headings, page numbering, and documentation style are all prescribed. The following page is an example that illustrates these features according to one style of documentation, the MLA 9th edition.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long should the essay be? The essay should be about 750-1000 words, which will typically be three or four printed double-spaced pages.

What if I don't take my FYS until spring? You still need to complete the essay before you come to Otterbein. Your essay will be collected at First Flight and given to your FYS instructor, even if your FYS course isn't until the Spring semester.

Who reads my essay? Your FYS instructor, who might grade your essay, using your writing to begin discussion of the book, or simply offer comments.

What supplemental materials are available? The Otterbein University library, Courtright Memorial Library, creates and curates a LibGuide dedicated to each year's Common Book.
<https://otterbein.libguides.com/CommonBookOU/iftin>

Who can I contact with questions? If you have other questions or concerns, please contact Colette Masterson, cmasterson@otterbein.edu.

Important Dates to Remember, Fall 2023

Your essay will be the first writing that you submit to your FYS instructor. Bring a **printed copy** of your essay to First Flight. The printed copy of your assignment will be collected and discussed during your **FYS course meetings**:

- First Flight – August 16-20, 2023
- FYS Meeting 1 – August 17, 2023
- FYS Meeting 2 – August 18, 2023
- Classes begin Monday, August 21, 2023.

The Common Book Convocation ceremony and virtual author visit will be held on Tuesday, October 24. There will be additional visits with Abdi Nor Iftin on October 23 and 24.

Last Name 1
Your Name
Professor
FYS 1000
August 22, 2023

Sample Essay

Academic writing follows certain conventions. These rules are typically dictated by a style manual, such as that published by the Modern Languages Association and commonly cited as the MLA Style Manual or simply MLA. These rules dictate form to ensure that essays are clear and readable as well as professional.

Typical rules for font choices will dictate not only the typeface to use, but also its size, spacing, and indenting. A common standard is 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. That style is demonstrated here.

Another fundamental concern in research is the incorporation and attribution of outside resources. Quotations are the most common and demonstrate knowledge of the text. Here is an example: “Although many Americans might not be happy with things in the United States, to me the protests were just a sign of freedom that people can get out in the streets and show their unhappiness” (Iftin, 259). Often a few words or a single phrase will be enough to illustrate your point, so you might paraphrase instead: Because Somalis identify by tribe more than anything else, Iftin is confused by the concept of choosing African as his race (259). Paraphrases should completely change the way the sentence is written and also be cited. It is not enough to change a few words. You will need to list all the sources you reference in a Work(s) Cited page, which goes on its own page.

Whichever form you choose, your ideas and analyses of the author’s words are the most important part of the essay. Introduce all attributions to make it clear they are the author’s words or ideas, and connect to your own arguments. For example, you might say: “When Iftin notes that the Islamic Courts brought order to Mogadishu, he also explains that this order prevented his freedom of expression (155-156). Once again, Iftin reinforces that Islam is both good and bad, a complex force at work in Somalia.” Note how this turns the attribution back to the argument, that Islam is complex.

Work Cited

Iftin, Abdi Nor. *Call Me American: A Memoir*. New York: Vintage, 2019.

Supplemental Information

Somalia's history has been marked by periods of great prosperity. What is now Somalia occupies most of the coastal region of the Horn of Africa, along the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (see Figure 1). This location made it an important trading gateway along the maritime Silk Road. Independent city-states popped up along the coast.

At the same time, Somalia is the result of many unique, independent peoples coming together and living alongside one another. Throughout its history, Somalia's people have had to negotiate changing borders, relationships with other countries, and even with other Somalians. Ethnic Somalis have Cushitic ethnic ancestry, like many of the peoples living in the Horn of Africa, but Somalis also have clan ancestry. There are more than 50 clans in modern-day Somalia. Clans have complex relationships with one another.



Figure 1. Approximate area inhabited by Somali people.



Figure 2. The colonial Horn of Africa in the 1930s.

After Islam came to the region in the 9th century, what is now Somalia was split into several independent Sultanates, which grew together and merged, or dissociated and grew apart, many times over the next 800 years. Meanwhile, neighboring Ethiopia became a Christian nation. When Ethiopia conquered the Ogaden region, it meant many Muslim Somalis were displaced from their homes, creating lasting tension in the region.

Somalia has been the target of European colonialism since the 16th century. The most destabilizing instance took place in the late 19th century, when France, Britain, and Italy claimed parts of ancestral Somali lands (see Figure 2). Their conflicts during the two World Wars had lasting consequences. Partly due to these consequences, Somalia has been engrossed in a civil war since 1991.

Call Me American takes place in the midst of this civil war, much of it during America's so-called "Global War on Terror."

Aggressive Reading

Reading at the college level can be demanding. This is true of *Call Me American*, which discusses concepts, uses terminology, and addresses issues you might not have encountered before. As a college student, you can expect **more** reading, reading that **challenges** your thinking, reading that **broadens** your view of the world, reading that **transforms** you. If you are going to read effectively at the college level, you cannot read passively; you must be a **proactive**, engaged reader. This means interacting with your text in ways you might not have before. To help you become that successful, **aggressive** reader, we recommend this strategy:

Locate: Choose a time when and a place where you are alert and focused.

Survey: Look at chapter titles, section headings, intros, topic sentences, words in bold type, graphics, and footnotes or endnotes.

Question: Prepare to interrogate your text with your assignment, your prompt, or your research question in mind.

Read: Armed with a view of the layout of the text and with questions you're reading to answer, read in chunks of 10 pages. Try to read 100 pages at a sitting. Your readings will be more efficient if you chunk the assignment into these more manageable parts.

Write: As you read, write—annotate the text, taking notes in the margin. This is your book to

keep, so make the most of it! Use a pen or pencil, not a highlighter; ask questions, circle unfamiliar words, connect with prior knowledge or other parts of the text, list names, underline key passages, and make marks to remind you of the importance of a part of the text.

Annotations work in the present, to help you engage with the text, and in the future, when you review the reading for a test or collect information for a paper.

Outline or Summarize: Outlining as you read helps you situate what you are reading into a larger context of information. Summarizing after you read a chapter, using your own words, is a good measure of your understanding of the text.

Journal: To help you read the Common Book actively and productively, keep a reading journal in which you note observations, reflections, and questions as you read. Pause to write every so often—using your reading journal as your ten-page break is a good start. Keep your outlines and summaries, as well as images, patterns, connections, significant people, and new ideas here. The journal will help you interact with the information in the text as well as serve as a record of your reading. This can be helpful for class discussions, assignments, and program events during the author's visit. The reading journal also consolidates your ideas into one place for your reference when you write your First Flight essay.

The Common Book Program is made possible by a generous gift from Mary B. Thomas, class of 1928. Our gratitude to Beth and Gary Daugherty for their gift to the Thomas Endowment.