

## East-West Virtual Book Club

Ahmed Abounaga, Imane Higazy, Abby Wiedenhaefer, John Ryan, Anise Issa, Hala Abdelgawad, Leisel Bogan

### The Challenge

In today's world we are inundated with infinite information and opportunities thereby increasing the importance of how we choose to spend and invest our limited time. The pursuit of knowledge is an endless endeavor and by summarizing culturally and politically influential books of both the United States and Egypt, this project attempts to capitalize on the investment of time by some and distribute the benefits of that investment and knowledge more broadly.



THE EAST-WEST VIRTUAL BOOKCLUB

### Project Overview

An initial list of such works may include Henry Kissinger's *World Order*, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, Scott Anderson's *Lawrence in Arabia*, Gamal Himdan's *Egypt's Character*, Robert Solet's *L'Egypt Passion Francaise*, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Frank Feuredy's *On Tolerance*, and Umberto Eco's *History of Beauty*.

The book summaries will be from an objective perspective, and the size of the review will range from one to four pages, depending on the complexity of the work reviewed. For each summary, the fellow will add a proverb from his or her culture that they feel best sums up the work. For works of especial significance, we will solicit brief political or social commentary from prominent figures in both cultures. All summaries will be provided in English and Arabic. Once the summaries of the books are written, we will create an online repository of the content that will be distributed via a monthly newsletter. We expect to do a monthly release of three to four books.

### The Goal

The goal of the project is to instigate dialogue and promote understanding between the cultures of the United States and Egypt by writing summaries of various books that have shaped the two civilizations. We will choose the books by committee based on their cultural and political significance. These books can be treatises, histories, novels, any book that provides insightful political, cultural, scientific or economic commentary significant to both Egypt and the United States. In rare cases where a work was made into a cinematic production, summaries will be provided for both works.

### Population Served

The initial audience of the project will be all Gabr Fellows, both past and present, but it is intended to appeal to a broader audience of individuals in both countries who lack the time to read entire books or

explore more deeply the literature that has influenced the development of the cultures of Egypt and the United States.

## **Project Milestones**

### **Phase 1:**

- In the first three months we will complete initial organization of the project, including the format of the summaries, as well as their arrangement and presentation to the Gabr Fellows and other interested parties through the Foundation website and listserv, or through another appropriate medium
- Each month, at a specified date, we will release reviews of two works, one written by an Egyptian, the other by an American

### **Phase 2:**

- By six months, we will work to develop a virtual community forum for exchanging audience ideas, opinions and insights
- Previous reviews from the 1<sup>st</sup> phase will be folded into the new weblog, while the format of twin reviews will be continued

## **Expected Outcome**

The expected outcomes for the East West Virtual Book Club include: elevated awareness of the Fellowship and its constructive role in fostering dialogue between the United States and Egypt; stronger ties between bibliophiles in the United States and Egypt; greater understanding of the intellectual histories of each country; a repository of useful summaries that could be used in educational institutions as study tools, in government as "cheat sheets" for background briefings, by other book clubs, or as reference materials for organizations seeking to develop similar exchange programs.

## **Furthering the Foundation's Mission**

The Foundation seeks to promote greater understanding between the peoples of the Middle East, Europe, and the United States by fostering dialogue and the exchange of ideas. The Virtual Book Club will promote and facilitate the exchange of the foundational ideas of each culture, and encourage dialogue about the intellectual history and development of each country. It will provide a platform for elevated dialogue, intellectual engagement, and for the disputation and discussion of ideas.