

# Western Intellectuals Need to Study Islam before Making Comments on the Subject

---

By [Jacob Thomas](#)

2005/11/20

Over the years, I have been very impressed by the intellectual output of William F. Buckley Jr., and by the role he has played in the revival of the Conservative Movement in America . It was back in 1960 that I discovered Mr. Buckley, when I noticed several references, in a doctoral thesis, to his “*God and Man at Yale.*” He published that controversial book in 1951, at the age of 26!

From then on, whenever I had the opportunity, I would watch Buckley’s “*Firing Line*” on television. What a delight it was to see him, and listen to the way he dealt with a variety of the topics of the day. You were in the presence of an erudite scholar whose comments were always made in a rather unique manner. The show was riveting; and you couldn’t help being amazed at the encyclopedic knowledge that Bill Buckley displayed as he dealt with various topics, including politics, history, and literature.

And now thanks to the Internet, I can glance at his web site: [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com) looking for his contributions, or those of his colleagues. I have read some of his books and learned, for example, that his schooling did not begin in English, but in Spanish. Later on his studies took him to France , and England .

So it was in connection with Buckley’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday that the Wall Street Journal published an interview with him on November 12. The headline read: **William F. Buckley Jr. Old School**, by Joseph Rago. Here are a few quotations:

***“NEW YORK -- There is something out of time about lunching with William F. Buckley Jr. It goes beyond the inimitable WFB style: the mannered civility, the O.E.D. vocabulary, the jaunty patrician demeanor. It is also something more than mere age. “Well, I am one day older than I was yesterday,” he says, with rather good cheer. Yet if there’s anachronism to Mr. Buckley, it is also a sense of being present at a moment of creation.”***

***“For all his versatility as editor, essayist, critic, controversialist and bon vivant, Mr. Buckley is widely credited as the driving force behind the intellectual coalition that drew conservatism from the fringes of American life to its center, with such side-effects as the utter collapse of the Soviet empire.”There’s nothing I hoped for that wasn’t reasonably achieved,” declares Mr. Buckley, who will turn 80 later this month.”***

The interview turned then to the current situation in France . ***“My view is unorthodox,”*** Mr. Buckley says of the violence roiling the French suburbs. ***“It seems to me that a very hard dose of market discipline would distract the attention of the young revolutionaries from their frolics, traditional and otherwise, and my sense is that if they had to worry about how to eat, and buy food, they would stop screwing around and face reality. If these people didn't wake up in the morning thinking about what cars to burn -- instead of work -- they might not be having these problems.”***

Frankly, I was left distressed by these rather casual and superficial remarks about one of the most disturbing phenomena taking place in the heart of “old” Europe . I mean the existence of large and growing Islamic communities that live in France and elsewhere in Western Europe who do not assimilate, regardless of their economic condition. Actually, no amount of ***“hard dose of market discipline would distract the attention of the young revolutionaries from their”*** destructive actions around Paris, or anywhere else in France . I don't deny that economics form an important factor in the unrest that has gripped the country since the end of October 2005; however, the root cause resides elsewhere. It is deeply imbedded in the inevitable clash between a secular European worldview that has pervaded France since 1789, and an Islamic totalitarian worldview the immigrants have brought with them, and which their children retain. It does not matter whether they were born in France , and hold French citizenship. This worldview includes all aspects of reality, this world as well as the world to come; it encompasses religion, politics, and culture, all wrapped in one hard cover.

It is rather audacious for me to suggest that Mr. Buckley misses the point on the main reason for the unrest in France , and that he should take a crash course on Islam, its history, its holy book, and authoritative traditions. He will soon discover Islam's utter uniqueness. It is unlike Christianity, or Judaism, or Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Shinto, or Confucianism. Islam is ***sui generis***, and it has been highlighted by the British author, V. S. Naipaul in his book, ***Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted People*** (published by Random House in 1998.):

*“Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of the converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil.”* P. xi

It is extremely important to emphasize that the appearance of large and growing Islamic groups all over Western Europe is, in a sense, an odd and novel phenomenon. Throughout most of their 1400 year history, Muslims have always lived in their own lands and were governed by Muslim rulers. Now, almost suddenly, they find themselves transported to live in the lands of the Infidels. They don't feel at home, or as they would say in French, ***“Ils ne sont pas chez-soi.”*** For these North African immigrants, regardless

of their social or economic status, feel ill-at-ease unless they succeed in remaking their environment into a part of *Daru'l Islam*. Naturally, when they feel marginalized or ostracized, that desire to create their own world, even by resorting to violence, becomes unstoppable. It is too early and unscientific to predict, on the basis of a fifty-year experience, that Muslims will ever assimilate, as other non-Muslim immigrant did.

There is something missing within the Muslim immigrant community, whether in France or elsewhere in Western Europe . This is being admitted by Arab intellectuals. For example, the former Kuwaiti education minister Ahmad Al-Rab'i wrote in the November 8 issue of the online daily, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, an article with this headline, **France : Crisis of a Society and of Minorities:**

*“An angry explosion within the forgotten Paris suburbs, and its change into violent acts of destruction, requires a deep dialogue among the Arab communities in France . Arabs should never have been involved in such destructive acts.”*

*“There is anarchy within the Arab community, and recent events have proven this. There are no sources of authority capable of filling the role of leadership and of bringing calm. There are no real institutions of civil society to shape and motivate public opinion among the minorities. The French of Arab origin have not managed to organize themselves culturally, or to rack up achievements in French society that would enable them to play a greater role [in society] and weaken the policy of the extremist racists.*

*“The French of Arab origin must act like French citizens, and must prove to the rest of the French population that they are an essential part of French society. This means that they must rack up achievements, must be very active in improving their livelihoods and educational conditions, must fight those elements [among them] that harm the Arab minority through deviant behaviors that damage the image of the French of Arab origin, and must rid themselves of the ghetto mentality and become part of French civilization...”*

There were several responses to the article, and it was surprising that the majority put the blame on the Arab community. As one respondent emailing from the USA wrote: “The Arab minorities suffer from a lack of capabilities because of their inability to assimilate within ... French society.” While another writer disagreed completely with the claims that the Parisian suburbs are similar to the poor suburbs in South Africa .”

Finally, I would like to quote from a headline that appeared in the French daily,

***Le Figaro***, on November 14, 2005 , under the title, ***Un nouveau djihad selon des sites islamistes*** (A New Jihad according to Islamist Sites).

“Arab Islamist websites have taken over the crisis in the suburbs. They have begun to dialogue with one another on sites such as *‘tajdeed.net,’ ‘alsaha.com’* or *‘alfirdaus.net.’* These global Islamist astronauts have launched their denunciations, referring to the French police force as the ***Crusaders***, and to France as the ***Land of the Infidels.***” And to

prove their allegations, these Islamist sites use photos or videos taken from Arab television such as Al-Jazeera, or from Anglo-Saxon media such as the BBC and CNN.”

“These events are represented as a proof that Muslims are now being attacked, and some jihadists on these sites are beginning to ask whether a new front is being opened in the war between the West and Islam! One site that belongs to the Iraqi jihadists, after showing several photos of ‘*Paris on Fire,*’ end with this ‘*dua*’ [a prayer] asking Allah to help the humiliated Muslims: ‘*O Allah, grant them victory.*’”

It is not my intention to defend France or any other country in Western Europe for their treatment of Muslim immigrants in their midst. The specific point I would like to emphasize is the impossibility of assimilating large communities of Muslims, as long as they keep and preserve their distinctively Islamic baggage. Their dilemma though is real, should they jettison that baggage, they would no longer be Muslims. So the problem may be summed up as an existential question: *To be, or not to be?*