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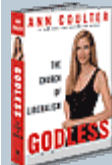
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Jihad Watch

Missing Americas 'Muslim Problem'

by [Robert Spencer](#)
 Posted Sep 08, 2005

Does the U.S. have a “Muslim problem”? Bret Stephens and Joseph Rago of the *Wall Street Journal* say no: “America’s Muslims tend to be role models both as Americans and as Muslims.” They grant that certainly “there can be no guarantee the U.S. is immune from homegrown Islamist terror.” However, “if it can be said that ‘it takes a village’ to make a terrorist, the U.S. enjoys a measure of safety that our European allies do not. It is a blessing we will continue to enjoy as long as we remain an upwardly mobile, assimilating — and watchful — society.”

This is an apt expression of the prevailing conventional wisdom on both Left and Right. Stephens and Rago base their sanguine view of American Muslims on purely economic and social factors: “According to Ishan [sic] Bagby, a professor at the University of Kentucky who recently made a study of mosque attendance in Detroit, the average mosque-goer is 34 years old, married with children, has at least a bachelor’s degree, and earns about \$74,000 a year.”

Unfortunately, however, none of this data amounts to what Stephens and Rago wish it did. It is noteworthy in the first place that they invoke Ihsan Bagby’s study as evidence of the comfortable assimilation of American Muslims, since Bagby himself has rejected the notion of assimilation: “Ultimately,” [he has remarked](#), “we [Muslims] can never be full citizens of this country. . . because there is no way we can be fully committed to the institutions and ideologies of this country.” He said this in the early 1990s and may have changed his views since he said this, but note that his quarrel was with American “institutions and ideologies,” not with economic injustices real or perceived.

It is not true that only ill-educated poor people actually commit terrorist atrocities. A forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Marc Sageman, recently conducted a study finding that, according to the *Times* of London, “the typical recruit to Al-Qaeda...is upper middle class, has been educated in the West and is from a professional background.” Likewise, Princeton economist Claude Berrebi studied over twenty years of data on suicide bombers from Hamas and Islamic Jihad, only to conclude, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that “only 13 per cent” of the



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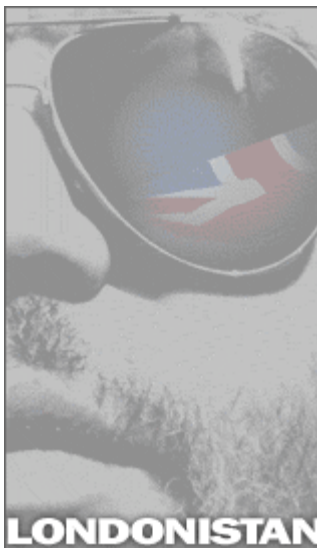
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jihadists “were from a poor background, compared with 32 per cent of the Palestinian population in general.” Education levels were higher among suicide bombers also.

We have witnessed the same phenomenon in the United States. [Maher Hawash](#) worked at Intel. He made \$360,000 a year. He married an American. Stephens and Rago would have confidently held him up as a role model and considered inconceivable the idea that he could turn out to be a jihad terrorist. And yet that is exactly what he turned out to be.

The *WSJ* article is yet another manifestation of a fundamental misunderstanding that blankets the public discourse about Islamic terrorism. Even at the *Wall Street Journal* they don’t understand that the primary motivation of the jihadists is a religious ideology. Economic injustice and marginalization are things they understand; a religious ideology that can move men to give up good lives and devote themselves to murder and destruction is so far out of their purview that they cannot even imagine it

There very likely are model citizens among American Muslims. But none of the statistics marshaled by Stephens and Rago does anything to establish whether or not among all these affluent and law-abiding Muslims there are people who, like Mike Hawash, nurse jihadist sentiments. Stephens and Rago do point out that “neither a first-rate Western education nor economic affluence offers any inoculation against extremism.” They note that 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta and Daniel Pearl’s killer, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, both had top-notch Western educations. One may hope that these reporters will one day try to find out why Atta and Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh turned to jihad terrorism — if they aren’t too afraid of what they might find. That fear, and the general unwillingness to face the real causes of Islamic terrorism, is what constitutes America’s *real* “Muslim problem.”

Mr. Spencer is director of [Jihad Watch](#) and author of "[The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam \(and the Crusades\)](#)" (Regnery -- a HUMAN EVENTS sister company), "[Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith](#)" (Encounter).

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