

It's All Relative, but Islam Is Best, Says George Mason U. Prof

by Andrew Harrod



Whittemore House, Washington DC.

At the 2018 Middle East Dialogue [conference](#) at Washington DC's [Whittemore House](#) last month, George Mason University Professor [Darrell Norman Burrell](#) whitewashed Islamism and exaggerated Islam's role in American culture. His "Islamophobia" lecture reflected the gathering's sometimes ahistorical radical chic that political commentator [Mark Bruzonsky](#) captured succinctly in earlier remarks. Together, their willful distortions of reality offered a microcosm of systemic moral and intellectual problems besetting Middle East studies.

Declaring Hamas leaders are "more dignified, more thoughtful, more aware of history" than popularly perceived, Bruzonsky also claimed that "Jewish Zionist ideology . . . is the real reason we don't have peace." Recalling his meeting with Hamas leaders [Abu Marzook](#) and [Ahmed Yousef](#), he noted bitterly that

it took place before the “Israeli lobby got Hamas declared a terrorist organization.” Burrell himself could have written Bruzonsky’s outlandish conclusion: “The problem is not Palestinian rejectionism; the problem is Jewish and American rejectionism.”

During his talk, Burrell lamented the “prejudice, hatred of Islam and Muslims,” conflating Islam, an idea, with individuals facing prejudice. He cited [survey statistics](#) demonstrating that many “Americans believe Islam is at odds with American values” without analyzing the merit of such beliefs. One LifeWay Research [survey](#) “challenged” him with four in ten protestant pastors who “agree that Islam is dangerous and promotes violence.” These ministers should “really try to seek wisdom and understand,” Burrell insisted.

Burrell’s value-free analysis extended to his discussion of the [controversy](#) surrounding Keith Ellison who, as Congress’s first Muslim member, made his oath of office upon a Quran. He noted that Ellison used a copy of the 1733 [George Sale](#) English-language translation of the Quran that Thomas Jefferson had owned, but omitted that Sale’s [foreword](#) calls the Quran “so manifest a forgery.” Burrell claimed absurdly that “Jefferson based his contribution to the Declaration of Independence” on different religious texts, and “the Quran being one of them.” In reality, “Jefferson was no fan of Islam,” as Muslim-American academic Amir Hussain has [written](#) and as Jefferson’s eighteenth century dealings with the Barbary pirates indicate. His landmark 1786 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom cited as its guiding example the “holy author of our religion,” the Judeo-Christian biblical God.

Displaying his cultural relativism, Burrell equated Islamic *hijab* doctrines for women’s dress to nuns’ habits or wedding veils. This glosses over the obligatory nature of veiling in places such as Iran, as well as Islamic doctrine that considers unveiled women shameful and subject to sexual abuse. He falsely claimed that Islamic veiling was “banned” in

France, when in fact a 2011 [French law](#) only prohibited full face coverings, such as the *burqa*.

In contrast, Burrell was extremely critical of Christianity and declared that 1995 [Oklahoma City bomber](#) “Timothy McVeigh was a protestant,” although no evidence shows that McVeigh had religious beliefs beyond childhood upbringing. Burrell asked why “we don’t really have a lot of discussions of: is Christianity a dangerous religion?” There are “extremes in all religions,” he equivocated, referencing the [canard](#) that distorts Christian symbols so as to portray the Ku Klux Klan as a Christian organization.

Employing politically-correct neologisms such as “micro-aggression,” Burrell fretted over a nonexistent “[Christian privilege](#)” rather than the actual impositions of jihadism or sharia law. At “work, I can put a Christmas tree up, I can say “Merry Christmas,” and people don’t think anything of it. But if I am from a different faith, then all of sudden people might feel uncomfortable,” he claimed. Apparently, Burrell has never heard of a “war on Christmas” or legal and economic [threats](#) to Christian, not [Muslim](#), beliefs about sexual morality.

Burrell’s solution to “Islamophobia” was increased interfaith interaction. More diverse corporations would have greater creativity, and it “really influences the bottom line.” He accompanied a slide displaying cake ingredients with the inane statement, “When you put it all together, that is how you make the cake.”

In fact, it’s how you make a mess of history, culture, and politics, not to mention reason itself. If the hallmark of supposedly learned experts is a determined use of intellectual and moral relativism to deny truth, lie about history, and insist on switching evil with good, then such sophistic proclamations deserve rejection. So long as the Middle East studies establishment legitimizes and empowers such pernicious

propaganda, it will remain a discipline in crisis, the sick man of academe.

Andrew E. Harrod is a