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The French Connection

BUSH'S EXISTENTIALIST TURN AND SEN. ALLEN'S *ARGOT* DISCUSSED.

Compile by Adam Christian

Posted Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2006, at 9:04 PM ET

George W. Bush's reading of Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*), combined with Sen. George Allen's public utterance of an apparently French-derived racial slur, represents the rare infusion of francophilia into American politics (by two members of the conservative establishment, no less). A far cry from the days of Freedom Fries, indeed.

TJA speculates that mention of this novel in *Talladega Nights*, the Will Ferrell NASCAR comedy, might have inspired W.'s choice.

As a matter of diplomacy, **Utek1 declares** it "probably unwise for the president to be seen reading a book about a soulless murderer of Arabs":

With Iraq in chaos, the ceasefire in Lebanon hanging by a thread, and the US making noises about invading Iran, the last thing Bush should be doing is throwing gasoline on the fire. But once an oil man, always an oil man.

Fortunately, the easiest way for Bush to make amends is to continue onto Camus' next novel, *The Plague*. Here, the hero isn't a murderer, but a doctor battling an epidemic of bubonic plague in the Algerian town of Oran. Despite the pestilence afflicting all those around him, the doctor continues to do his small part to relieve their suffering. The image of Bush reading about a Western caregiver providing comfort to Muslims during a bleak moment in their history would be a lot better PR for Bush than to be seen getting tips on how to murder Arabs without remorse.

Contrary to Dickerson, **bhardin** offers an **alternative theory** about the quintessential symbolism shared between Mersault (the protagonist in *The Stranger*) and G.W.:

The most interesting aspect of the novel is why Mersault is put to death. It isn't because he killed Arabs, which was rarely met with the death penalty. Rather it was his lack of compassion and explanation of his motives to the demanding public. Ultimately he was killed because he showed no sadness for the death of his mother. The public viewed him as inhuman. Bush is persecuted like Mersault not because he is a "remorseless killer of Arabs", but because he doesn't engage the public to explain himself. Bill Clinton also killed Arabs (e.g. bombing a "chemical weapons" plant/hospital in the Sudan) during his last

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