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Authors	Mohler, R. Albert
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No One Needs French Theory — Baudrillard Speaks

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Jean Baudrillard, one of France's most prominent thinkers, is famous for his theory that reality is constructed out of *simulation* and *simulacrum* — signs and images. In a media driven age, these signs and images replace the real and appear as the dominant cultural reality.

Now, in the current issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, Baudrillard explains that the recent uprisings of Arab youth in France can be attributed to that nation's failure to integrate young Muslims into French society and culture. His prediction: *It will get worse and worse and worse. For a long time, it was a relatively friendly coexistence or cohabitation, but the French haven't done much to integrate the Muslims, and there is a split now. Our organic sense of identity as a country has been split.*

On America: *America is constituted by ethnic communities, and though they may compete with one another, America is still America. Even if there were no Americans living in the United States, there would still be America. France is just a country; America is a concept.*

On the influence of French theory (especially deconstructionist thought) in America: *That was the gift of the French. They gave Americans a language they did not need. It was like the Statue of Liberty. Nobody needs French theory.*

Baudrillard's social theory is helpful in understanding how the images and ethos of pop culture become dominant in society. Nevertheless, he offers no genuine understanding of reality — only critique. Americans should not be fooled by his comments. Baudrillard sees America as the most hypermodern and image-driven society in world history. He once remarked that he visited America in order to observe "the finished form of the future catastrophe."

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