



West-Central Europe

CULTURE

France's Unsettled Immigrants

Like the United States, France has attracted millions of immigrants to its shores in recent years. In France for Bastille Day—the French equivalent of the Fourth of July—an U.S. journalist examines French multiculturalism.

Pick any dozen Frenchmen and one will be a foreigner. Pick any twenty and one will be a Muslim. Go to the great Mediterranean port of Marseille and pick any six. One will be *Arabe*.

These numbers . . . have in recent years tested France's long tradition of accommodating foreigners. Marseille, after all, was settled by foreigners: Anatolian Greeks some 25 centuries ago settled there and called it Massilia. They may have chosen a site occupied earlier by Phoenicians. . . .

After the 1789 Revolution the young French republic became known as a "land of asylum [refuge]." Today it shelters 140,000 political refugees: Vietnamese, Chileans, Iranians, Poles, Palestinians. After both World Wars, workers flowed in from Italy and Spain and Portugal to help rebuild, and share in, France's prosperity. They blended in; perhaps 750,000 Portuguese remain.

Then came the revolts in [Vietnam] and Algeria and the ending of France's empire. French colonials came home, many of them bitter. After them came thousands upon thousands of former colonial subjects in search of work—perhaps a million and a half from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia alone. They were welcomed at first, since France had a labor shortage. The labor shortage evaporated, but the population of Muslims in France continued to grow.

Marseille is the clank and drone of cranes and conveyors, the hum of pipelines, and the curses of longshoremen in a dozen languages along 40 miles of modern docks and yards that dominate commercial shipping in the Mediterranean. . . . Marseille is [also] the gateway for the Arab influx. Some of the immigrants entered illegally. Many more were legal but have remained strangers to almost all aspects of French society. Yet others have become fully acclimated and find themselves strangers to their North African or Islamic heritages. Who is then a foreigner and who French?

. . . She wore her hood of bouncing curls over a chic leather jacket, designer jeans, and red heels. And when Malika Chafi spoke, her dark Arab eyes danced to the beat of her rapid-fire French. "My father has lived here 50 years," Malika said. "He fought in the French army against the Germans, then he spent all of his working life here in the dockyards. . . . I was born here. I can have French nationality. But still I keep my Algerian passport. Sometimes I feel like that white ferryboat, sailing the blue sea in between."

“Each of those ferryboats brings another 800 problems into the country,” complained a journalist acquaintance when we talked about France’s immigrants. The conversation was disquieting [disturbing]. Jean-Paul was an educated man, well traveled, articulate [fluent] in French and English. Yet he was convinced the “foreigners” were a menace. . . .

France’s ringing national anthem, “La Marseillaise,” immortalizes the people of this city, and it is so named because Marseille’s regiments sang it so enthusiastically during the Revolution. And on Bastille Day its people still do. Close by the reviewing stand I squeezed in among some of the darker faces that peppered the crowd. . . . Squads of young soldiers and sailors passed in smart revue followed by blue helmeted gendarmes [police officers] on motorbikes, lumbering tanks, and a convoy of polished red fire trucks. . . .

Through it all a young Algerian father next to me watched passively [without expression]. His thoughts were easy enough to divine [determine]. These proud regiments once occupied his country; one man’s patriotism is often another man’s tyranny. Hospitality here has done little to thaw his soul. But the toddler aloft on his shoulder enjoyed a different perspective. He wiggled his toes, chewed a croissant [a French pastry], and in his brown fist fluttered a tiny French flag.

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Understanding What You Read After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways did World War I and II contribute to population changes in France?

2. Why are many Algerians and Vietnamese living in France? For what reasons might some of them not feel strong patriotism for that nation?

Activity

Use the Internet and other resources to research recent developments in the immigration issue in France. Prepare a short report of your findings.