

The conflict on immigration in france history essay



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France has a very rich and long history, first becoming a recognizable entity from thousands of years ago as Gaul, even preceding the Roman Empire. The nation has accordingly interacted with its surroundings and the rest of the world since antiquity. One prime example of this is its significant colonial past: since the beginning of the 17th century and the founding of Quebec in 1608, it held numerous territories around the globe, such as in Africa and Indochina (Warfford). In addition to vital industrial resources, a primary purpose of these holdings was for laborers. This need was exemplified in World War I, when workers from Asian and African colonies were needed in Europe to maintain France's war effort, and shortly after World War II to aid reconstruction and recovery ("French"). This quickly became a steady, large flow of immigration into the country. For a while these newcomers were welcomed by France, but recently, specifically from around the late 1960s and early 1970s, there has been a trend of increasingly cold greetings to them. Major domestic conflict from this has occurred; a significant manifestation of it is the series of major riots in 2005 by immigrants in the suburbs. There is a multitude of causes for this. In France, due to differences in social viewpoints, more unfavorable economic conditions concerning both immigrants and natives, and political resistance towards immigration, immigration has caused much domestic tension and conflict in the country, similar to the conflict in the United States.

Social perceptions in France between immigrants and natives and their direct effects have naturally caused domestic tension between the two groups. Owing to the colonial ties that France has had with Algeria and other entities starting from the 19th century, there has been much migration into

the country from those regions since after World War II. This movement of people from these regions, among others, resulted in the introduction of significant other cultures and ethnicities that differed from those of the regular French person from the start. For example, while the vast majority of native French people used to be Christian, the immigration of Algerians and other North Africans created a new and still-enlarging Muslim minority; currently, this group composes up to a tenth of the French population and about a third of all immigrants (CIA). Secondly, groups of immigrants and their families in France tend to clump up into tighter communities and societies for mutual support, especially in the numerous French suburbs. They often either are unable to or refuse to integrate or assimilate into a unified culture and society, instead separating into ghetto-like regions but firmly establishing themselves as long-term residents of the country, such as through the inwards movement of their families. Nevertheless, immigrants and their children in France suffer social marginalization (Zappi). France has also been historically secular by law and keeps religion out of politics firmly; thus, cultures are able to spread out and develop in these areas and cultural and religious divide between immigrants and natives has steadily become apparent. Because of this, there have been growing worries about the spread of radical Islamism in many of these communities (“No Cover Up”). Finally, popular opinion on immigration, although mixed, overall leans slightly towards xenophobia. This is exemplified by one French citizen’s comment that “if one refuses to be French, that is refusing to accept French culture and national society in general, he or she should leave the country” and that “France will not adapt to fit the immigrants” (“Les Français Issus de L’Immigration”). Intolerance of foreigners is further demonstrated in that <https://assignbuster.com/the-conflict-on-immigration-in-france-history-essay/>

during the last 35 years, the majority of respondents in various surveys agreed that there are too many immigrants in France, particularly North Africans, because they are “poorly integrated, intolerant, disrespectful of French law and potentially subversive” (Schain 75). In addition, there is alleged racial profiling from police, which has oftentimes led to some violence. Meanwhile immigrants, especially those of North African descent, demand an end to the nation’s discriminatory attitudes and policies, and desire acknowledgement that they indeed make net positive contributions to French society (Brottem). Their voices are heard, but not entirely responded to. Immigrants have also been given a degree of affirmative action concerning housing and the like from the French government in order to integrate them into French society faster. However, in addition to the cultural resentment against foreigners and their relatives, there is a strong sense in French society stemming from the French Revolution that every person should be treated equally. Native French citizens are therefore angered that the immigrants are allowed favors and privileges apparently unfair to them (Rocheffort). As a result of these distinct viewpoints on national society and cultural differences and fears, many natives are turning against immigration, believing it to be a harmful force to them.

In addition to social opinions and cultural differences, worsened economic conditions are a primary cause of dispute over immigration. The history of recent economic downturns in France starts with the late 1960s, when rates of economic growth began to decline. The French economy then stabilized, and did not develop as rapidly as it did prior to the downturn. While in the past a steadily growing labor force was needed from migrants to supplement

that of the natives within the country, this slowdown logically meant that employers have needed fewer external, foreign workers and stopped recruiting them for the most part, focusing more on the available pool of labor within the country (Murphy). Socioeconomic restructuring has also contributed to this (Guiraudon). One example of this is that education and labor market experience from overseas are often significantly less valued than human resources gained within the country (Friedberg). On the contrary, the rate of incoming migrant workers has not necessarily decreased accordingly. Consequently, there is increased tension between settled immigrants and natives over employment, most markedly on the lower levels of the economy where immigrants and their children have composed noticeably larger proportions of the workforce. Many natives feel that it is difficult to find a job competing with immigrants, and this is a major part of the debate against the latter. This problem is intensified by that the unemployment rate has stood consistently around 10% since the mid-1980s (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics). Younger immigrants in France are further embittered and more aggressive against the natives economically because their joblessness has stood even higher historically and because they usually occupy poor areas that wealthier people have left (Schain 47-48). Furthermore, immigrants tend to start more independent businesses than natives, attributed to their willingness to take more risks in the relatively uphill journey to create a firm grip in the economy and community (Verbosky). Although this creation of new businesses has the long-term potential to generate more jobs including for the natives, it leads to much increased commercial and industrial competition between immigrants and natives. Thus, France's native citizens would lose profit and would fall behind

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financially. There also are major concerns that the economic benefits, such as extra labor and tax income, that the immigrants by themselves may provide do not offset the costs of accommodating them in France. For instance, many officials believe that the cost of public housing for immigrants is too expensive especially when considering the large numbers of unauthorized immigrants residing as well (Schain 47). Civic services such as welfare, police and fire protection, although they are rudimentary for all people, have been suffering from the increased expenses caused by the increased population on the part of the immigrants and their children.

Though France's immigration problem has primary causes regarding socio-cultural and economic factors, the largest cause seems to be the policy generally against the inflow and residence of foreigners. From 1973 onwards, French government immigration policy has focused primarily on reducing and deterring immigration (Guiraudon). There have been numerous ordinances in the last quarter of the 20th century that toughened regulations for immigrants, governing their entry and regulation. One of the most notable of these is the "Pasqua Law" of 1993. In this edict, among other restrictions, entry of immigrants into France became easier to deny, police could freely perform identity checks, and children of immigrants born in France are made to choose citizenship between their country of parental origin and France, rather than being given citizenship upon birth (French National Assembly and Senate). As well, the government has called for limiting access to residence and citizenship to most immigrants except for the highly skilled and educated, and has aimed to especially restrict immigration for familial purposes, which currently makes up the majority of

inwards migration (Murphy). This intrusion into what can be considered the civil rights and free will of immigrants in France has straightforwardly caused tension between the government and immigrants in addition to conflicts of national interest, “[turning] foreigners into undesirables by making life precarious for those who are called upon to remain in France” (Zappi). Another point that the French government makes is the deportation of unauthorized immigrants. There are many undocumented immigrants in France, estimated at about 200, 000 to 400, 000 people, but efforts to expel them have been hampered by that large, established population and the fact that they still have access to public French services in education and health (Rocheffort). This political movement is popularly supported as well: since the early 1990s, French political parties gained ground from electorates through arguing for reduced, or even zero, immigration, and the expulsion of Muslim immigrants, the largest group of immigrants (Guiraudon). The government has also taken steps to assimilate immigrants into France, aiming to create a single culture and society instead of a mixture. An example of this is the debate that was launched by President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009 concerning French national identity (Lichfield).