

“Jusqu’ici Tout Va Bien.”

*So Far, So Good.*

Trends in history do not betray their definition by ceasing to exist after only periodic occurrences. With each episode, a pattern throughout time becomes more rooted in normalcy, occasionally shining with particularly large and meaningful events. An incident, such as the Holocaust and its theme of the ‘us versus them’ divide cannot be separated in remembrance – it is necessary to review why such a pattern permitted an episode, like the Holocaust, to occur in the first place so that warning can be highlighted for future generations. The Nazis in pre-World War II Germany captured the divide between the Jews and the rest of society, using it to further their own political agenda. Six million Jews died in their augmentation and abuse of the ‘us versus them’ rift, however some of the persecuted lived to be human storybooks. Primo Levi, Holocaust survivor and author of *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), experienced the Nazi regime as a prisoner of Auschwitz. In his reflection, he describes the way that history is created and recorded as “to reduce the river of human occurrences to conflicts, and the conflicts into duels – we and they, Athenians and Spartans, Romans and Carthaginians,” leaving only the “vanquished and the victors,” “winners and losers,” and the “good guys and bad guys” (37). The schema of the hero and the despised, psychologically created for easier comprehension, is also dangerous, where, according to Levi, understanding operates as simplifying (36). Important elements of a world thick with beauty, diversity, and complexities cannot be addressed in a society of black and white. It is within the norms of simplicity that the Nazis were allowed to manipulate other German citizens.

As the 100 year anniversary of the Holocaust approaches, the modern world hardly seems to be at a better state than where the atrocities of that time period had left it. Acts of violence on

television screens no longer incite surprise by its viewers, and arrogance between opposing groups, countries, and organizations ruins any chance at compromise. The fissure between ‘us and them’ proves to be extremely relevant in immigration-related issues, particularly in France and the United States of America. Attitudes and legislation in both countries have sparked lively debates across the political spectrum, and, although both countries have their own unique ideals and problems, political discourse on the subject is comparable among the conservative voices of each country. When considering the recent terrorist-related attacks that France has been subjected to, it is logical to question whether the United States could gain valuable insight as to what harmful speech and attitudes towards immigrants can lead to. In a question of the relationship between causes and effects, France has created a correlation between a country’s views towards immigration and the number of terrorist attacks there within a given time frame. Potential is great for the United States to gain some foresight from their republican counterpart across the Atlantic.

France’s city of love and grandiose, Paris, hides its racial secret within the suburbs, the *banlieues*<sup>1</sup>. *La Haine* (1995), directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, is a suspenseful film famous for its portrayal of the *banlieues*, where a large percentage of France’s immigrant population resides in ethnically diverse, run-down housing projects. Although produced over twenty years ago, the piece is still regarded as relevant today despite the growth of social and political hate within the world. The film follows three friends – the Jew, Vinz (Vincent Cassel), the West African, Hubert, (Hubert Koundé), and the Arab Maghrebi, Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui) – as they wander around the *banlieues* the day after a friend was left hospitalized as a result of a police bullet during riots the night before. The film portrays the complete loss of hope that is found in the *banlieues* by employing mundane

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<sup>1</sup> A literal translation of *banlieues* from French is ‘suburb’, but unlike an American suburb, the term *banlieues* refers to the environment of social problems within the outskirts of Paris.

scenes involving nothing much more than just sitting around. The characters, knowing that life outside the *banlieues* is an impossible dream never to be achieved, build up frustration at the ever-present stagnancy and direct it towards an authority that does not seem to be working for their rights, the police. In *La Haine*, there is no small talk, only stark contrasts between silence and rage. There is no progression, only a dichotomy between life and death.

To a certain extent, the attitude of the *banlieues* remain untouched by development in recent years. According to Andrew Hussey, an English culture and history scholar based in France, 2015 had not brought many aesthetic changes to the area around Paris – the buildings and atmosphere of hopelessness has remained constant – but the rise in political Islam has taken root there. Gilles Favier, a photographer who worked on the original film, talked about what a sequel to *La Haine* would look like:

In 1995 I had my doubts whether a black guy, a Jew and an Arab would be friends, but now everything is much more divided. And this is because of the rise of political Islam in the *banlieue*. This is what created more division and tension and so now it is not just youth against the police or the state, but also youth who are wanting to kill Jews and go to Syria. *La Haine* was about friends and maybe some hope. Nowadays I think you could only make a film about despair. (Hussey)

France has personally seen the impact of the increasingly powerful hand of political Islam in recent years, even beyond the *banlieues*. A string of terrorist attacks commenced with the targeting of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in response to the paper's publication of a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad. Brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, under the influence of the group, Al Qaeda, were responsible for the death of 12 people. According to Eva Polonska-Kimunguyi and Marie Gillespie of *Terrorism Discourse on French International*

*Broadcasting*, the attack was “the deadliest assault on human life to have been committed on French soil in the preceding two decades”. Less than a year later on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a series of attacks around Paris took the lives of 130 people (“What Happened?”). Eleven men, including ringleaders Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Salah Abdeslam, carried out the acts throughout the evening. ISIS has since claimed responsibility for the violence (“Attackers”). Most recently, 84 people were killed on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Nice, France, when driver Mohaned Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a truck through two kilometers of crowd celebrating Bastille Day (“Tunisia”). Almost not surprisingly, the statistics between terrorist acts and the background of the terrorist show that many come from disadvantaged parts of larger cities: most are from immigrant communities, have a low level of education, 70% have been unemployed and 30% have only obtained basic manual jobs (Polonska-Kimunguyi). The violence, frequent and significant, did not come without reason.

To understand the recent surge of radicalism within France, it is important to divert attention back to the past. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France engaged itself in the Scramble for Africa in an attempt to keep up with other European countries’ efforts to colonize the world. By 1914, France controlled substantial land in North, West, and Central Africa (Stovall 208). Unlike the British, France’s mission in the colonies, in addition to economic gain and power, was to bring civilization to those that they conquered. The French sought to spread their language, history, and culture throughout the world in a *mission civilisatrice* (Allen 2), expecting their subjects to act like the European French, despite the fact that they were not given the same rights or titles as their French rulers. The *code l’indigénat* justified any abuse that the French subjected to the people living in their colonies, indicating that they were lesser than their guests (Stovall 227). The French gradually stopped asserting political dominance over their colonies throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leaving countries to deal with

the volatility that resulted from a lack of opportunity for self-determination. The African countries had artificial borders that did not reflect the extreme variances between the humans within them, and in countries such as Algeria, the Ivory Coast, and the Central African Republic, violence and instability ensued the departure of French rule. Civil wars and insecurity lead to the creation of refugees seeking safer places to live, and they found that place in France. As citizens of a country that at one time was ruled by France, logical relocation for them would be found in their former colonizer who speaks the same language and has shared history. A significant amount of France, however, does not view their past colonial endeavors as a modern responsibility, and ignorance of the effects from the Scramble for Africa remains potent.

Attitudes by the native French, the ‘colonizers’, towards the immigrant French, ‘the colonized’, are maintained within the country today, impacting France’s race relations within the *banlieues*. The thought that the refugees would be fully accepted in French society is ideal, but the optimistic concept of ‘we’ does not exist in the hierarchy created by colonization. Justin Smith, history and philosophy professor at Paris Diderot University, analyzes the relationship between France’s colonizing endeavors and their current attitude towards those who want to immigrate into the country in *The French Intifada: The Long War between France and Its Arabs*. The French, he claims, are a bit hypocritical when it comes to the people they once held as French citizens: “Their [the immigrants’] status was transformed from that of colonial subjects to that, simply, of foreigners” when attempting to create a life in France. The French ideals extended to many of French citizens are not inclusive, such as the French motto “*liberté, égalité, et fraternité*.” This phrase is perverted in such a way that it does not apply to all those who live in France but rather only those who have a long line of ‘Frenchness’ in their blood. As Smith explains, “when equality is invoked... it is understood that this is equality among equals. Political and social inequality is

allowed to go on as before, as long as it is presumed that this is rooted in a natural inequality.” Those who immigrate into France are not seen as equals and have not been since they were considered inferior by their civilizing counterparts. This is the natural inequality that Smith mentions; no matter where their subjects live - in France or in Africa - they will always be seen as inferior and not equal. The phrase, “France is over,” is an indication of the mindset of war between “the people who make up the real France and the imposters” (Smith).

The fight between the two opposing sides comes from a clash between the ideal of French Republicanism and the diversity of the immigrants coming into the country, where France is still, in part, operating under an outdated standard for their country. Created during the French Revolution (1789-99) in response to an absolutism monarchy regime, the French Republican model vowed for a new era of strict egalitarianism for every citizen of France. The creators of the new Republic brought forth a supposedly blind government to diverse ethnicities, creeds, economic situations, and backgrounds (Identity 66). Unlike the American model of republicanism that calls for equality under the law while still embracing unique characteristics, French Republicanism acts as a route to subdue diversity in favor of the promotion of becoming loyal French citizens all with the same values, beliefs, and culture. Social and political integration achieved via French education is the most preferred method to solidarity as a nation. However ideal, the model that is the basis for the French government has been undermined by various factors in the last century, the largest being the incredible influx of immigrants who started entering the country with the emergence of industrialization. The promise of economic prosperity that lure immigrants into metropolitan France causes problems for the French Republican brand, which could not have expected that France would be the home to 6 million Muslims today, the largest Muslim population in Europe. Unadapting, the French Republicanism model cannot serve to

protect those immigrants that live shut off from society in the *banlieues*, where black and Arab citizens are two times more likely to not have a job than a white citizen with the same degree and other credentials, unemployment is 80% higher than other urban areas, and children over the age of 15 are 50% more likely not to have a diploma than other French children (Canet 10). France teaches its immigrants on what it means to be French through education but fails to allow the immigrants to actually be French socio-economically. “Social exclusion” of the *banlieues* creates a cycle of violence, riots, and unemployment that does not permit the optimistic and archaic French Republican model to exist (Béland 67).

Outside the *banlieues*, the reactionary answer to the increasingly diverse population of France also does not allow the possibility of secularistic equality to exist. Unlike the United States that has always prided itself on diversity and its mosaic of unique cultures, France has historically existed as a homogenous society with its native population as the majority. The French public saw the emergence of extreme-right wing populist parties, most notably the National Front, in the late 1980s in response to an increase in diversification, integration, and globalization within the country and throughout Europe. The National Front, according to their documents, aims for the “Preference, Protection, and Unity of the Country” (Davies 5). The organization’s preference is to those of Frankish or Gaulish ancestry, or most white French citizens today. The National Front desires to serve for the protection of French culture from outside forces, leading to the party’s belief that France should remove itself from the influence of globalization and the European Union. The ideals of the party maintain that France should be for the white French, an attitude that Justin Smith, as mentioned earlier, would agree that would appeal to a considerable amount of Parisians and other French citizens.

For a political party like the National Front, the frustration of society is key. The National Front collects the anger of its supporters towards their misfortunes and validates it. A typical supporter of a political party like the National Front is middle class and blue collar, somebody who can see immigrants coming into their country as those who will eventually take their jobs and leave them with more economic hardship. Because anger is universal, the National Front is able to draw support from all sides of the political spectrum. The ‘anti-establishment’ appeal is one that is heavily relied on by the National Front, according to Alain Bihr, a French sociologist:

People are liable to vote FN even if they suspect that the discourse of the party is incoherent or somehow ‘wrong’. This is a vital point. It leads us to believe that the motivations of FN voters are various. Indeed, it would be true to say that while some French people do commit themselves to the FN on account of the ideas and policies it embraces, others- perhaps a significant minority- vote for the party in spite of the party’s discourse and ideology, or even completely ignorant of it. It could be argued that for these people it is anger at, and frustration with, the political system which provokes them into voting for the FN- a significantly vociferous ‘anti-system’ party. (Davies 15)

Americans reading about the policies and beliefs of the National Front should be able to draw connections with the current United States’ President, Donald Trump. In fact, it was Marine Le Pen, the current National Front leader who praised the victory of Trump and claimed it incited hope for France (Ashkenas). In a New York Times article titled *Euro-Trump*, Thomas B. Edsall lists the similarities between the two parties. Both parties, he claims, function off of a fear that their respective countries are becoming less of what they once were - less American and less French, respectively. They capture this fear from the ordinary working class whose



economic security is continually at risk and direct their resentment towards outsiders at rallies. As Edsall points out, “both movements demonize immigrants in language that even traditional politicians who share their views ordinarily reject.” Le Pen was noted calling the immigrants ‘barbarians’ in a campaign speech, while many Americans can recall when Trump named Mexicans ‘rapists’ and ‘drug traffickers’ in his presidential bid announcement. Both leaders have a basic way of communicating so they can gain the trust of the middle-class, some of whom do not have a high degree of education. Peter Davies derived this about the National Front: “It seems to be that Le Pen’s discourse is flawed, but still, somehow, attractive to many French voters” (Davies 14). Even at times when then presidential-hopeful Donald Trump responds to criticism about his communication abilities at a campaign rally in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, saying “I went to an Ivy League school. I’m very highly educated. I know words, I have the best words. I have the best, but there is no better word than stupid,” support for him not only remained, but grew (McGinness).

Campaigning discourse aside, the most important ties that Edsall drew between the two conservative parties are their use of the theme of ‘us versus them’. Both parties, he claims, tend “to portray conflict as a struggle between the weak and the strong, them and us.” They use the already present division between the races in their countries as a medium for their growth. The immigrants take the blame of a failing government, repeatedly pointed out by Le Pen and Trump. Very recently and in the first week of his presidency, the new president of the United States rolled out a series of executive orders pertaining to America’s immigration policy, which was welcomed with praise by some and protested by others. Most notably present in the orders was the go-ahead for planning to build a wall between the American and Mexican border and others that restricted the flow of immigrants and refugees into the States. Trump also issued a

suspension of issuing visas to those from seven predominantly Muslim countries and permanently banned the migration of refugees from Syria to America (Pace). Although Federal Judge James Robart temporarily suspended the President's moves in regards to the immigration ban on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, the action taken by the White House within the first week of Trump's presidency provides a glimpse at the intentions of this new administration to restrict the movement of immigrants into the United States' borders ("Trump Travel Ban"). It seems that the actions taken during Trump's term will shift America's vision into a more exclusive country, a focus on the 'us versus them' rather than a 'we.'

With the rise of terrorist groups across the world, it is valuable for a country to take caution and make deliberate, well thought-out foreign relations decisions. According to Eva Polonska-Kimunguyi, former journalist and current professional researcher of contemporary European communications, and Marie Gillespie, Professor of Sociology at The Open University with specializations in diaspora and media relations, there are two ways that a country could address terrorism: by the root causes that created the manifestation of widely publicized terrorism, such as a lack of democracy or extreme poverty, or by the permissive factors that allow acts to happen as they are planned by radical groups, such as by a lack of security and political, physical, economic, and institutional weaknesses. The actions taken by both the Trump administration in the United States and the campaign promises of the National Front in France for the election of 2017 show that they are more concerned with the immediate gratification that comes along with fixing the permissive factors. A look at recent history shows that this is the fallback in many situations. In the fall of 2005, riots shook the entirety of France. By the end of their strongest three weeks, the riots had touched 300 French cities, included three deaths, 200 million Euros in damage, 10,000 vehicles burned, and 307 buildings were lost. The Minister of

the Interior at the time and soon-to-be president of the French nation, Nicolas Sarkozy, removed the “political significance” of the events, blaming gangs, drugs, and a resignation of the Republic rather than root causes, such as discrimination and failures of the schools (Canet 9). Likewise, instead of the Trump administration working to improve relations with war-torn countries, officials pass orders to shut their nation off from immigrants seeking hospitality. Perhaps instead of assigning causes of terrorism and instability to artificial reasons, the heads of a country should try to engage itself in fixing the root problem, resulting in a permanent solution and the elimination of the ‘us versus them’ mentality for generations to come.

It is important to note that the actions taken by the executive branches of both France and the United States of America do not reflect the attitudes and desires of every citizen of their respective countries. Indeed, it was Hillary Clinton, pro-immigration candidate, who won 48.2% of the popular votes against Donald Trump’s 46.1% in the United States’ presidential election of 2016 (“Election”). Although the National Front’s popularity has grown significantly in the last few years, still only one in five millennials support the party (Chadwick). National Front leaders are hopeful that the upcoming election on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 will be prosperous for them, and predictions show that this belief is not too far imagined. However, if the extreme right-wing party in France is elected into power, one must remember that this is not the death of all others’ beliefs. Just as political diversity remains potent in the United States of America even after one new party takes office, the same will be true for France. An action of the majority does not represent the entirety.

Anti-immigration lawmakers are playing a dangerous game, one where the stakes and polarization increase with every terrorist attack and corresponding legislation passed in response. A world full of despair is hard to believe in, and 2016 pushed humanity in a direction where

hope is hard to find. Divides between groups of people have grown to accompany globalization, and it is hard to see where any recovery can be found from the hate spewing from every side. Hubert from *La Haine* said it best right before the end credits roll for the film: "Heard about the guy who fell off a skyscraper? On his way down past each floor, he kept saying to reassure himself: So far so good... so far so good... so far so good. How you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land." Right now, the world is falling. Time will tell how we will land.

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