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“The Grand Turk and Inquisitor: Huguenot Immigrants
and the Black Legend in 17th century England”

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England’s acceptance and integration of the French Huguenots into its colonies and industrial cities after Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 has been well studied. The Huguenots gave the word “refugee” to the English language, and contributed to the way English liberalism defined good citizenship and the treatment of the outsider. Less investigated is the way that the English ability to make space for the inclusion of these French Protestants was based on the reinforcement of anti-Catholicism. Specifically, scholars have only just begun to point out that energy and motivation for caring for these refugees was based on fears regarding Catholic tyranny as embodied in Louis XIV.

Until the Restoration, English fears about Catholic tyranny had been embedded in anti-Spanish concerns and the development of a historiography known today as the “Black Legend.” The Inquisition played a large role in English views of the Spanish and their belief that the Catholic faith inspired cruelty, injustice, and secret persecution of minority groups. This paper assesses the discussion in the English press (public sermons, printed testimonials from Huguenots used to raise money and support in England, propaganda against Louis XIV) during the reign of James II regarding the Huguenot plight. It uses these arguments to analyze in what ways the memory and mythology around the Inquisition and Black Legend were

used to marshal support for the acceptance of the French Protestant refugees. Such an assessment can help us understand the way in which the nascent liberal English state was able to expand citizenship for a certain group of immigrants, but only at the expense of continuing old, deeply-ingrained prejudices. It is possible such an analysis can expose the continuing challenge for modern liberal democracies around how to welcome the stranger without creating new enemies or reinforcing old battle lines.

First, the refugees asked for financial aid as well as legal status within Britain. Often it appears, as in the memoirs written by Isaac Dumond de Bostaquet, that the Huguenots attempted to build on the shared history of persecution and Protestantism rather than on changing to become English. The Huguenots didn't want to lose their identity—they were, in this sense, a “conservative” immigrant group and tried to pass on their religious and cultural, and even political, identity to the next generation, while at the same time making themselves as minimally obnoxious as possible to the host culture. Shared Protestantism and the story telling of their persecution and forced migration helped to do this.¹ They defined “Englishness” as Protestant culture rather than in some other ethnic characteristic.²

While historians such as Tony Claydon and Steven Pincus disagree regarding whether or not Protestant identity was paramount in the wars of the late seventeenth and

¹ Ruth Whelan, “Writing the Self: Huguenot Autobiography and the process of assimilation” in *From Strangers to Citizens: the Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550-1750*. Edited by Randolph Vigne and Charles Littleton (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 470-472.

² Ruth Whelan, “Writing the Self: Huguenot Autobiography and the process of assimilation” in *From Strangers to Citizens: the Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550-1750*. Edited by Randolph Vigne and Charles Littleton (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 470-472; Glozier, 48; Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 312.

early eighteenth century, (and certainly supporters of William's war in Britain seemed as likely to use the language of opposition to universal monarchy and economic interest as that of opposition to "popery"), the Huguenots definitely pitched themselves to the heads of state as people who would help in forwarding the Protestant side of that conflict.³ As part of the larger international Calvinist community, their long history of emigrating to Protestant states for refuge from persecution and maintaining ties between those immigrant communities gave them a strong sense of a Protestant network between states.⁴ Those who emigrated may have been more militantly committed to that Protestant identity and in many of their host countries they worked (sometimes with success) to promote a Protestant foreign policy, specifically targeted at Louis XIV.⁵ Certainly their status as victims of persecution allowed observers like Gilbert Burnet to self-righteously declare that even Roman Catholics in England did not think their situation was as bad as the Protestants in France.⁶ Ultimately, then, the Huguenots and their supporters were very skillful in continuing the high levels of emotional support for these victims by continuously releasing stories and memoirs of their persecution.⁷

And it was a concern about a 'papist' invasion of their nation, and its equation with things French that caused concern among some of the English that the Huguenots were pseudo-Catholics. In 1692, one conspiracy theory involved the supposed Huguenot

³ David Abercromby. *A Moral Discourse on the Power of Interest*. (London, by Thomas Hodgkin, 1690), 140 (Wing A83).

⁴ Matthew Glozier. *The Huguenot Soldiers of William of Orange and the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688: The Lions of Judah*. (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic, 2002), 38-41. This network was as much economic as it was military and religious.

⁵ Both Catholics and Protestants found Louis XIV a villain, and the Catholic Hapsburg allies of William kept this war from being associated only with religious elements. Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 117; Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage*, 27-28.

⁶ Gilbert Burnet, *Ecclesiastical Princes* (London, 1682), 97.

⁷ *Popish Treachery; or a Short and New Account of the Horrid Cruelties Exercised on the Protestants in France*. (London: by Richard Baldwin, 1689), Wing P2958; *An Account of the Sufferings and Dying Words of Several French Protestants under this present Persecution*. (London, 1699) Wing A396.

refugees rising for King James, declaring that “there were several thousands of the French who passed here for Protestants and go duly to the French Protestant churches, who are indeed good Catholics and would show themselves to be so upon King James’s landing.” In fact, the Huguenots sometimes suspected that French Catholics stirred up trouble among the immigrants just to bring disrepute on them, knowing the English propensity to believe the worst.⁸ The Fontaine family dealt with constant accusations that they were secret Catholics. James Fontaine reported that in Taunton he was called “a Jesuit in disguise, who said mass in his own house every Sunday; as well in one word, as a thousand, he is a French dog who takes the bread out of the mouths of the English.”⁹

This is why the Huguenots made constant attempts to remind their hosts of their status as victims in this conflict with Louis XIV. The consistent insistence within the French churches that their members reiterate their persecution stories, recant their Catholic conversions where necessary and articulate their commitment to the true faith was reinforced by their unwillingness to sponsor any of the French poor who were less than orthodox in their Calvinism.¹⁰ The Bishop of Worcester advised his clergy to promote the benefit of the French Protestants in England, spending money on the refugees instead of themselves and leading the laity by example in giving.¹¹ And John Evelyn commends the Bishop of Bath and Wells for his sermon condemning French persecution especially because the Bishop had been accused of leaning towards

⁸ As cited in Bernard Cottret, *The Huguenots in England: Immigration and Settlement, c. 1550-1700*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 193, 265.

⁹ Fontaine, 143.

¹⁰ Cottret, 200, 201.

¹¹ Bishop of Worcester to his clergy. March 1688. BL Add 27.448, ff. 340, 341.

Catholicism. Advocacy on behalf of the Huguenots could sometimes secure one's reputation for being sufficiently Protestant.¹²

Huguenots, then, while fighting alongside their British comrades in the war against Louis and his allies, were able to access more complex elements of solidarity than simply Protestantism. There were times when national identity and security were not made clear or established by Protestantism alone. The economist Charles Davenant, even as he argued for a greater political inclusion of the Huguenot immigrants, reminded his readers that “all things were not secure, because Religion was out of danger.¹³” The Huguenot presence helped the English articulate that it was more than just Protestantism that they needed to be concerned about—there was the despotism of universal monarchy. However, the immigrants also understood that the opposition to the French monarch was made more emotional and strident when British citizens were reminded of his persecutory ways. French Catholic despotism that persecuted—that was the kind of ‘popery’ that they emphasized.

Because of their history of owing their liberties to protection by the French monarch, Huguenots had often emphasized their commitment to royal power. The monarchs of England, too, were extremely supportive of the ‘protestant strangers.’ The support was not only political, but economic. The royal invitation from William and Mary made specific reference to English commitments to “support, aid, and Assist them in their several and respective Trades and ways of Livelihood.”¹⁴ And the committee established to disburse the charitable funds was almost giddy in its

¹² John Evelyn, *Diary* vol. 2. E.S. de Beer, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 261.

¹³ Davenant, 224.

¹⁴ England and Wales. *By the King and Queen a Declaration for the encouraging of French Protestants to transport themselves into this kingdom.* (London, by Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, 1689) (Wing 2505).

reporting of the numbers of churches built, refugees assisted in starting business, and migrants sent off to the colonies.¹⁵

The use of Huguenots to settle the colonies reveals a great deal about what kind of polity England desired to become and to rule. As part of her economic expansion, and as committed Protestants, the Huguenots were crucial. But they were also not-quite English and it was safer for the liberal state to use them in growing their empire rather than try to assimilate them during a time when the economy might not be able to handle them.¹⁶ Their strong military contribution to the Williamite settlement, first in battle and then as settlers in Ireland especially, made it possible for their later participation in banking and manufacturing and trade to bear fruit.¹⁷ Certainly, in their military service and subsequent integration into the empire, Huguenots were part of a long-standing tradition within liberal states whereby immigrants demonstrated their commitments and worthiness of citizenship by fighting for their host government. In fact, it has been argued that the years of relative ethnic peace within the British leading up to the American Revolution were at least partly made possible because the English could export their ethnically problematic immigrants. Thus, they essentially passed on the problem of “what it meant to be English” to the American colonies.¹⁸

Huguenot attempts to integrate into the English political economy demonstrate the ways British citizenship was being defined in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Crucial to this was their articulation of their status as a beleaguered religious group, who had suffered righteously under Catholic tyranny. In fact, they

¹⁵ *Declaration of Royal Grace and Bounty*. (London: s.n., 1695), Wing (CD-ROM 1996) H2087.

¹⁶ O'Reilly, 496, 498.

¹⁷ Glozier, 5.

¹⁸ Olson, 488.

published and popularized the narratives of their persecution, knowing just how important such stories were for their English hosts and helpers. Clearly, their Protestant credentials eased the concern British men and women often had for outsiders.

In spite of all this, however, it wasn't a simple case of English Protestants recognizing their benighted brethren and welcoming them with open arms. The debates over their proposed naturalization expose the fluid and sometimes-conflicting boundaries regarding who should be part of the British political community. William and Mary offered the legal rights of voting and office-holding to individual Huguenots, but during this period Parliament never passed a lasting general naturalization act giving all Huguenots these privileges. Many churches and charities worked with and helped financially support the new-comers. On the other hand, mobs (most of them English artisans who would have seen their strong influence in the cloth trade as an economic threat) demanded they be deported. In fact, there were constant complaints about Huguenot immigrant competition with English craft workers. Their own attempts to maintain their identity, their different patterns of eating and dressing, not to mention their bilingualism, contributed to the tensions. It was sometimes even rumored that they were secretly Catholics. The debate was not solved, and during times when wars were going badly, the succession seemed unsure or the economy was failing, the more narrow definition, the fear-filled position could dominate. But always there were those arguing for a wider identity, for a Protestant unity that could transcend ethnicity, for a commitment to a liberty which encompassed Europe as well as England.

I argue that the Huguenots provide us with first modern case of the debate about immigration and national identity—just at the time when citizenship and the

nation-state were being formulated. They functioned in the same way that immigrants often have for liberal democracies. They were important to fulfilling English ideals of themselves as the freedom-loving Protestants fighting against international Catholic tyranny and they provided useful economic skills. They worked hard to demonstrate their commitment to English political and economic institutions, developing a rhetoric that emphasized their common concerns. But they also created structures that reinforced their own identities and supported their sense of community, which provoked questions about their fitness for naturalization. They thus provided a flash point for English anxieties. In the Huguenot experience between the Glorious Revolution and 1715, we find many of the early patterns for liberalism's response to the economic and political complexities of immigration and citizenship in the national community.