

## The Conflicts of the French Slave Trade and Human Trafficking Today

As of 2016, the newest information provided states that, “Each year about 2.5 million victims, mostly women and children are recruited and exploited worldwide.” [1] France has been doing its best to fight against this concern, but despite that, human trafficking is the, “. . .third most common form of trafficking in the world next to drugs and arms. . .” [2] In addition to this, human trafficking generates more than Rs. 2,40,000 crore every year. In US currency, one crore is 10,000,000 rupees (Indian currency), which is \$160,000. This means that in total, human trafficking makes more than \$38,400,000,000 every year. This might seem like an excessively large amount of money, but considering that there are around 2.5 million victims annually, the price adds up. France is especially worried about this crime because it is one of the top ‘organized crimes’ committed, among others. Especially since France is a frequently used country to transport and sell victims—it is in the middle of Europe; traffickers can take them from countries in the south and move them to buyers in the north. In hopes to curb the rising rate, France has taken to the implementation of the, “Palermo Convention which aims to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.” [2]

Human trafficking is a global problem, and not only is the atrocity being committed worldwide, but it also isn’t something that is new. Before human trafficking (similar in context to human smuggling, but different in regard to how those who are being brought across borders are treated) was even called human trafficking, it was called slave trading. The only differences between then and now is that then slaves were generally Africans, and now anyone can be trafficked—especially women and children as they are usually sold as sexual objects. In addition to that fact, trafficking is an illegal activity and before the Abolition, trading was considered common and legal. While the act itself is horrible, it has economic ramifications as well; bringing such a large quantity of people over borders to sell is just like illegal immigration. Whether the victims want to cross borders or not doesn’t change that title, the fact that they are now unregistered people in a foreign county makes them immigrants. In the end, these thousands of unwilling illegal immigrants affect the country they’re being brought into—and in this case, it’s France’s.

Post-modern day human trafficking can be referred to as slave trading. France supported the slave trade with much gusto, sending off around 4,200 voyages (via ship) transporting a total of 1, 250,000 slaves. [3] Considering the transportation and resources available in the period, this was a massive amount, even though when compared to today’s human trafficking total of 2.5 million people it doesn’t seem as much. Figure 1 depicts the cramped and inhumane conditions existing on a slave ship. While nations like US and Britain had gone through the abolition, other nations—like

France—continued to practice slavery. [4] The French turned almost four times as many Africans into slaves as other slavers, and that was probably helped by the fact that the French started slaving before others, and they stopped around 1830 where others stopped before that. France’s

leading slave port was Nantes, which by itself carried 55,000 slaves in 180 ships. [6] The French didn't limit taking their slaves from just Africa either, they took slaves from places like Sumatra, Nias and other French colonies. Since slave trade was so booming for the French, the number of slaves in France grew and grew (primarily Africans). However, there were restrictions about how long/how they lived in France, dictated by the Code Noir. Slavery in France continued until 1848. Evidently, France was the staunchest supporter of slavery, and that reflects in how they're one of the most involved countries with human trafficking today.

Today, trafficking, like smuggling, is a form of immigration, and when countries continue to take in immigrants it can get difficult to compensate for the rapidly increasing population even if the immigrants are documented. As clarification, many human trafficking victims originally were people who hired others to smuggle them out of their country—normally during crisis—but some of the smugglers didn't bring the immigrants to the intended destination, but to another place to sell them. This resulted in illegal immigrants becoming victims "Traffickers frequently take away the victims' travel and identity documents, telling them that if they attempt to escape, the victims or their families back home will be harmed, or the victims' families will assume the debt." [7] Figure 2 depicts a semi-current census on how many victims were *found* in Europe. These victims were specifically Nigerian, and while France isn't the top polling, many

victims were still trafficked into France. [8] Unfortunately, there are more than just Nigerian victims and this report covers only those saved. Illegal immigration started in France during the first oil shock in 1974, and since then, ". . . illegal immigration has become a constant feature of French political and social life. . ." [9] Around 200,000 and 400,000 are in French territory and 80,000 to 100,000 more come every year, [10] that's many more mouths to feed and people to house. Sadly, among those immigrants, over 20,000 of them were trafficked and not smuggled.

Unlike human trafficking, the slave trade was not a hush-hush operation and in fact, most slaves were either kidnapped, "There is a great reason to believe, that most of the negroes shipped off from the coast of Africa, are kidnapped," [11] as it happens today, or they were sold as prisoners of war. Alexander Falconbridge, a member of the growing abolitionist movement—those who are against slavery—studied the manner in which slaves were acquired and documented it in his book, *An Account on the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*. Slave traders had several means to acquiring slaves; they snatched them off the streets, used animals to hunt them down, or as stated, received them from other clans as prisoners of war--which was a very effective way of getting income for many clans. For those who weren't sold as prisoners of war, there was no way of knowing who was going to be victimized and captured. ". . . a negroe informed me, that being one evening invited to drink with some of the black traders, upon his going away, they attempted to seize him. . . he was prevented from effecting his escape by a large dog. . ." [12]. Many slave traders used trickery to capture Africans; "The unsuspecting countryman readily consented, and accompanied the trader in a canoe to the side of the ship. . . black traders of board, who appeared in secret, leaped into the canoe, seized the unfortunate man, and dragging him into the ship, immediately sold him" [12].

Because trickery was used to take slaves, and African's sold their own as slaves, there was no way of knowing that if anyone was safe from traders. "[Slaves sold at a fair] consist of those of all ages, from a month, to sixty years and upwards. . . Women sometimes form a part of them, who happen to be so far advanced in their pregnancy, as to be delivered during their journey. . ."

[12]. The book, *Children in Slavery through the Ages* states that boys (négrillons) and girls (négrittes) were usually defined as fourteen years of age and younger. [13] Figure 3, titled *Woman and Child on Auction Block*, is a sketch done by an unknown artist in the 1800's, it clearly depicts how white man did not care who they took

and sold, as long as they profited. [14] Considering that this form of human trafficking was accepted, slave trading could be considered worse than modern day human trafficking: this wasn't a secret operation, people were taken off the streets, and they were sold immediately in fairs. The fact that the French took almost as much as four times the number of slaves Americans did and that they were heavily involved in the vending of slaves, it is without a doubt that French slavers did this to many of the slaves they sold. Unfortunately, slaves were a popular commodity in France, but at least France can't be blamed as the only culprit for this horrid affair. As an abolitionist, Falconbridge didn't approve of slavery let alone how slaves were acquired. Assuming Falconbridge is a wealthy man—as he has the money to travel and the money to publish a book—his information would have more impact and influence on those who were abolitionists as well. Falconbridge intends that his book gets to those who thought they get their slaves by legal means, and that if people understood how these slaves are acquired, then they might have stopped purchasing them--additionally, for those who were against slavery, this is could have been another means of rallying the troops to fight for abolition.

As stated previously, over 20,000 illegal immigrants were originally intended to be smuggled over borders but they were taken advantage of by those who smuggled them. Illegal immigration, aided by human traffickers and smugglers, negatively affects the country that the immigrants reside in. When it's legal, the economy is better at managing the negative consequences, but when it is illegal, that's when the problems are harder overcome. Either way, immigration in large numbers generally does not have a positive effect on the country. "Immigration and its consequences are among the most important social and political issues. . ." [15] Illegal immigration—in this case by trafficking—negatively impacts the country in ways such as jobs being taken up, taxpayers resources being used, and terrorism increasing. It also causes problems that have often led to hunger strikes and protests. For example, most immigrants get jobs where employers don't care if they have a VISA or not. These employers normally treat their employees horribly: bad hours, bad pay, bad working conditions. The only way these immigrants can improve their working conditions is by striking. These negative impacts get worse and worse depending on how many immigrants are moving in, and currently, ". . . France [has] the world's highest rate of immigration, 515 per 100,000 inhabitants." [16] Although much has been put into place to stop illegal immigration and stop the consequences once it happens, France still does suffer.

Illegal immigration is—obviously—illegal, slave trading was not. However, when a Frenchman wanted

to purchase a slave and bring it back to France with him, he had to register the slave as his with the government. If the Frenchman failed to do this, then if it was found out or the slave loudly announced that he was free/he wanted his freedom, then legally, according to the law in France, the slave wasn't purchased and isn't that Frenchman's slave. If the slave wanted to, it could find a way back home. These laws can be found in the Code Noir, which is the Edict Concerning Negro Slaves and it was issued by Louis XV. During the Triangle Trade, the exact number of Africans in France (free or enslaved) was between 4,000 and 5,000 entering and leaving the country. [17] The Code Noir was ". . . originally introduced to regulate the life of slaves and freedom in France." [18] It stated that slavery was necessary and authorized and said that slaves were property. (Like how human trafficking victims are treated.) The Code Noir was unethical—in today's views—but it was also there to protect slaves as well, from mistreatment from whites. In regard to having the register the slave, it was not necessarily for the slave's protection, but so the slave owner to bring the slave to France without losing his property. "In order, to maintain these property rights the slave owners were required to follow the procedure outlined by the Edict of 1716." [19] The Edict of 1716 stated that slave owners were required to obtain permission of the governor of the colony to bring the slaves to France, and then when the slaves were brought, to register them in Paris at the Admiralty. If the slave owner didn't do this he was subject to large fines and loss of his slave, bringing slaves without registering them was illegal immigration. Bringing slaves to France was a form of immigration, and with this immigration the population increased, while back then the increase of population didn't cause the economic problems it does today, it was the stepping stone of modern day human trafficking.

A prime example of a slave gaining freedom in France because his owner didn't register him is that of Francisque. Francisque was a non-African slave brought to France via his owner Sir Brignon. Francisque worked many years and he managed to make enough money to buy his freedom, however, Sir Brignon denied his request to leave and it was brought to the Parliament of Paris. During the ruling, it was realized that Francisque was never actually registered and the verdict was that Francisque was free and that Sir Brignon had to pay him ". . . 800 livres for eight years' back wages, plus 200 livres in interest and damages for his imprisonment during the trial." [20] Francisque is an example of historical illegal immigration.

Slave trading in France was common, and not properly documenting your slave resulted in having to pay heavy fines to the previous-slave and the government, however, the increase in population was not so big that it caused economic crisis. Despite that, illegally having a slave was like human trafficking today. The difference is that the negative impacts of illegally owning a slave and human trafficking is that for the slave, the owner must pay the consequences, and in trafficking, the consequence is much grander: the impact is more severe and it affects the whole country and not just the owner. Slaves then and victims now were treated similarly as well: they were used sex slaves/workers, both were/are treated cruelly and unfairly against their will. Despite all, modern day slave trade is a globalization problem, especially in France where it is the #1 organized crime, it is extremely prevalent. Not only does it hurt the victims, but the economy in regard to how it not only increases/promotes organized crime, but it increased the population of illegal immigrants. Human

trafficking is calamitous on all levels.

#### Endnotes

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[19] "'There Are No Slaves in France': A Re-Examination of Slave Laws in Eighteenth Century France." 146.

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Geographic Focus: France (including Nantes, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Le Havre, Saint Malo, Lorient, Honfleur, Marseilles), Africa, America.

Search Terms: (slav\* AND France) also, prostitut\*, smuggl\*, trad\*, consensus, immigra\*, "Code Noir".

Primary Source Database: Digital Public Library of America

Primary Source Search Date Limiter: before 1979. Date range was between 1800's-1979. Also 1987

Historical Research Questions: How does the slave trade roll into human trafficking (did the slave trade just never stop but just become quiet)? Would the economic impact of having slaves in France during the slave trade have increased if the Code Noir wasn't issued?