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Posters, Politics and immigration during the May 1968 Protests in France

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Posters, Politics and immigration during the May 1968 Protests in France

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

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Abstract

How were immigrants, immigrant issues and their histories represented through radical poster art created during the 1968 protests and strikes in France? The May 1968 protests remain one of the most significant moments in contemporary French history and it occurred during a time when immigrant populations were rapidly increasing. There is a multitude of research, analysis and reflections on the protests and strikes; yet there is very little mention of the place of immigrants during this event. Art collectives that were created during the protests designed and produced posters that later became a symbol of the strike. By using a variety of primary and secondary sources including small press publications, interviews, manifestos, historical and artistic secondary sources this work argues that it is during this social movement that immigrants and immigrant issues entered French social discourse and this can be seen by exploring the messages presented in the posters.

Posters, France, May 1968, Immigration, Atelier Populaire, Affiche, Protest, Strike, Students, Workers, History, Paris

Posters, Politics and Immigration during the May 1968 Protests in France

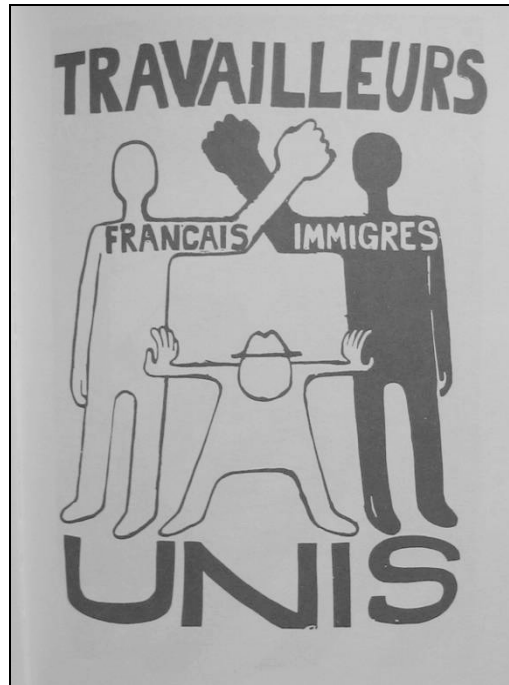


Image 1: 'Travailleurs unis' ¹

“A wall has always been the best place to publish your work.”

-Banksy, British graffiti and street artist. ²

The above poster appeared on the walls of Paris on May 22, 1968. In this poster there are two figures on either side and a shorter figure in the center. One of the taller figures is outlined in black with the word *Français* written across its chest and the other tall figure is solid black with the word *Immigré* written across its chest. These two figures represent French and immigrant workers and the center figure represents an authority figure, likely the “boss”. The figure personifying the boss is wearing a businessman-like hat and is standing in between the two taller figures pushing them apart. In the center of the background, above the head of the

¹ Michel Wlassikoff, *Mai 68 L’Affiche en héritage*, 2nd ed. (Paris, France: Alternatives, 2008), 29 and 63.

² Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London, UK: Random House, 2007), 8.

boss, the two workers have their arms crossed with their fists raised in a gesture of resistance and solidarity. Finally, the top of the poster reads *Travailleurs*, and *Unis* across the bottom (workers unite). When this poster first appeared France was in the midst of one of the most significant general strikes in contemporary history. University students began the strike early in May and were soon joined by automobile factory workers and then followed by workers from varying sectors of the French work force. At its peak nearly 10 million people were on strike and virtually the entire nation was at a standstill.³ The underlying inspirations of the protests were anti-Gaullist and anti-imperialist in nature. The participants demanded a collective and popular alternative to what they saw as an oppressive, hierarchical and materialistic society.

During the 1968 protests posters and the related art of graffiti became some of the most recognized methods of mass communication, and hundreds of posters were designed and printed in France. Some posters contained strictly images while others were heavy with words. Yet the purpose of the poster was to state an opinion, inform the public, express an emotion or declare issues or concerns in an artistic manner. Artists, students and workers, who, for the most part, participated in newly established art collectives, created the posters. The most notable of these art collectives was the *Atelier populaire*, which literally translates to the people's workshop. Participation in the *Atelier* was open to the public and members comprised of art students from the *Ecole des beaux-arts* as well as other striking students, professional artists, and workers from various industries who together operated out of the occupied art department at the *Beaux-arts*. They collectively decided on designs for political posters which they printed and posted on the streets around the city.⁴ The subject matter of the posters varied widely, from ridicule of the

³ Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), xix.

⁴ Laurent Gervereau and Gérard Fromanger, "L'atelier populaire de l'ex-Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Entretien avec Gérard Fromanger," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 11, no. 1 (1988): 184-185.

state to philosophical statements about society, and from clear worker sentiments to artistic imagery of social alternatives.

Estimates of the number of posters that were designed during the protests fluctuate between 350 and 700; however, 500 is a consistent figure of how many posters were produced.⁵ Among these posters approximately sixteen stand out because the message features immigrants and/or immigrant concerns. These sixteen surviving and accessible posters are a glimpse at the burgeoning movement towards social equality in 1968 France. They offer the viewer an illustration of the life that an immigrant in France faced during this time period, including the search for suitable housing, the struggle for equality in the workplace, and concerns over deportations and borders. These three themes remain constant areas of concern for the immigrant populations living in France. Further, lingering influences of empire and race, while not addressed directly, can be identified in this sample of posters. While there only may have been sixteen posters concerning immigrant issues produced the fact that there were sixteen at all is an example that these issues were gaining recognition among the striking students and workers and their acknowledgment of these issues and production of these posters helped to inform more of the general public.

During the 1960s, the immigrant population in France spiked and this became a defining moment for France to reevaluate its relationship with the growing immigrant populations. As the immigrant populations increased so did the demand for work, housing and legal rights to citizenship and the presence of immigrants became increasingly relevant to the greater population in France. Immigrants in France were not afforded equal opportunities or the same

⁵ Michael Seidman notes both extremes: Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004), 159. Vasco Gasquet's work is titled *500 Affiches de Mai 68*: Vasco Gasquet, *500 Affiches de Mai 68* (Brussels, Belgium: Les édition Aden, 1978). Michel Wlassikoff states more than 500 posters were designed: Wlassikoff, *L'Affiche*, 25.

rights as their French counterparts and endured a multitude of social discriminations and prejudices while settling for sub-par housing and employment. In turn there was growing support for reform of the policy and practices concerning immigrants and it is during the 1968 protests that we begin to see immigrant issues enter into the popular French social discourse. Prior to the May 1968 strikes, immigrants had participated in and organized a number of protests and social movements.⁶ However, it was in 1968, when the masses of France began to more openly support reform for more immigrant rights. Historian Kristin Ross states, “May ’68, in fact, marks the emergence onto the political scene of the *travailleur immigré* (immigrant worker) in French society,” while other historians, such as Michael Seidman, infer that immigrants did not play a truly significant role in the May 1968 protests.⁷ However, it is during this time that students and workers begin to take up immigrant issues and incorporate these issues with their concerns and this exposure contributes to a greater awareness of immigrant issues. The posters created during the 1968 protests were not the catalyst of this development but a reflection of it. In order to understand the message of the posters produced during the 1968 protest I will examine their production, and the motivations behind the greater social movement and the situation of the immigrant at the time of the protests. In addition to the posters, I will utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources, including small press publications produced during and shortly after the 1968 protests, manifestos of participating organizations, interviews, and various historical and artistic analyses. By using the posters that were designed and printed during the protests as one piece of evidence we can see the emergence of these issues in the French social consciousness.

⁶ For instance, from October 17 through 20, 1961 Algerians living in Paris organized protests and demonstrations that turned violent. For more see Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961 Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc, 2006), 106-107.

⁷ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002), 95- 96. Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 12, 174, 230 and 282.

'68: an Overview

In 1968, social unrest was widespread. Students and workers led social movements in every corner of the world. The enormity of 1968 was felt globally as historian Jeremi Suri explains, “What made 1968 special was the rapid succession of disorders, their intensity, and their geographic range.”⁸ The United States was faced with numerous social movements including the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam War protests. China was in the midst of their Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong. Students in Japan violently protested the United States military presence in their country and its involvement in the Vietnam War. In Mexico the students disrupted the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. In Europe, too, student movements were bubbling up everywhere. In Germany the student movement was deeply concerned with global issues ranging from the Vietnam War to the shah’s repressive rule in Iran and also focused closely on the country’s Nazi history. Further, student movements took hold in Italy, England, Czechoslovakia and France.⁹ In many instances these student-led social movements paralyzed the education structure as well as the governments of these nations and enthusiastically encouraged participation from the general public. Concerning global issues, the students were motivated against the Vietnam War and what was seen as U.S. military imperialism, but internally most of the social movements were struggling against dictatorships and cuts in social programs, such as education, within their own nations.

⁸ Jeremi Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (New York, NY: WW. Norton and Company, Inc., 2007), xvii.

⁹ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 341-343. Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005), 82-83, 146, 171-172, 329.

The student protests in France began at the University of Paris campus at Nanterre, a notorious industrial *banlieue* (suburb) northwest of Paris. Factories and “the barrackslike [*sic*] homes of North Africans and Portuguese immigrants” surrounded the university.¹⁰ It was far from the city-center and lacked cafes and other social settings for students. Students were witness to the atrocious living conditions and day-to-day difficulties that plagued the immigrants who lived in the Nanterre suburb. Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman describe the Nanterre campus as “a student body frustrated by its surroundings, experiencing diffused and undirected discontent, given a sense of its importance, but denied a real voice.”¹¹ Some historians believe this setting helped to radicalize the students. For instance, Ross explains that the constant exposure to the living conditions in Nanterre contributed to successes of future social movements with immigration reform into the 1970s.¹²

On May 2, members of a group of students, called the March 22 Movement, planned an anti-Vietnam War protest, but the protest was canceled and the Paris Academy rector, Jean Roche, closed the campus.¹³ The following day, students from the Nanterre campus met in the city center at the Sorbonne to face a disciplinary panel. Again, due to growing protests by the students, the University was closed. Government intervention and police presence shocked and outraged the students, giving them even more reason to protest.¹⁴ Over the next week, the students held daily protests and meetings to organize their actions. Friday, May 10, was a particularly disruptive evening that became known as the “Night of Barricades” after violent and destructive protests carried on throughout the night in the Latin Quarter. The evening began

¹⁰ Kurlansky, *1968*, 220.

¹¹ Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 4.

¹² Ross, *May '68*, 95-96.

¹³ The March 22 Movement was named after a previous protest at which students were arrested protesting the Vietnam War.

¹⁴ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 118-119. Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, 10.

when the students held a demonstration that later broke off into smaller groups, which split up around the quarter to build barricades out of whatever they could find overturning cars, pulling down street signs, and tearing up the cobblestone streets. When the fighting began the police threw teargas and the students threw cobblestones and Molotov cocktails. Many of the Latin Quarter residents experienced the police violence as their homes were infiltrated by teargas from the streets below.¹⁵ On the following Monday, May 13, 100,000 workers in Paris and its surrounding areas joined the students in what would grow into a nationwide general strike, one of the greatest in French history.¹⁶ The general strike included postal workers, transportation workers, teachers, and department store employees. Banks were closed and television and print news was stifled. By the middle of May nearly 10 million people were on strike.¹⁷ The general strike included nearly every employment sector in France and every person was in some way affected by the protests and the strike.

Réflexions sur mai

The 1968 protests became one of the most significant moments in French history and over the years there have been numerous interpretations of the events. Immediately following the May protests a flood of critiques and memories of the events were gathered and published. This has continued throughout the years following the May 1968 events especially around its anniversary. Originally, these publications mainly took the form of printed material, but in the following years these memories were often compiled into television commemoration specials and magazine exposés. The meaning of May has constantly evolved in French discourse. For

¹⁵ Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Street*, 22-27. Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 134-142.

¹⁶ Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, 33.

¹⁷ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, xix.

example, Ross asks if all the looking back and remembering the May '68 events has made people forget its central meaning. Ross examines the memory of 1968 as it has been presented in various mediums of mass media through the years and she explains that May is often remembered as a student movement, “a generational revolt of the young against structural rigidities,” and forgotten is the “shattering of social identity that allowed politics to take place.” She explains that historically May 1968 is seen as a cultural revolution; yet she argues that the motivations and the outcome of the protests were truly much more political than cultural.¹⁸ Contrary to Ross, Seidman argues that the memory of 1968 as a profound revolutionary moment is exaggerated and that “the effects of 1968 were rather limited.” He believes that many social and cultural changes attributed to the protests occurred in France before 1968 in the post-World War II decades leading up to the strikes. Further, he believes that May as a political event was a failure because it did not lead to the worker’s revolution that the participants had envisioned and in its conclusion the event itself proved the state had centralized power and control:

The events did not mark a rupture but instead showed the continuity of social and political trends. No crisis of civilization suddenly erupted, and no significant attempt at workers’ control emerged. On the contrary, the May-June events demonstrated the power of the centralized state and the attractions of a consumer society that had effectively smothered revolution while integrating hedonism.¹⁹

Ross sees May as a moment of political progression whereas Seidman sees May as a much less influential moment in history.

It is true that France was witness to many social and cultural changes in the post war decades that preceded the 1968 social movement, and it is also true that the protests in 1968 fizzled to an end and there was no all out worker takeover of the government. However, this social uprising had many successes that have contributed to its historical relevance. First, the

¹⁸ Ross, *May '68*, 3,6,13 and 15.

¹⁹ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 12 and 282.

size of the 1968 protests holds great significant because as the movement grew so did ways in which others were influenced and informed of it. Second, the way the strikes and protests were organized helped the movement to gain rapid success and shaped the organization of future social movements.

The size of the 1968 protests were greater than anyone would have expected and the magnitude of the event came as a complete shock and can be considered another success. The idea of an uprising or social revolution of this size seemed highly unlikely in a modern capitalist society and would not have been possible without the active participation of the middle class. Political writer Daniel Singer argues that the success and magnitude of this movement was a result of the *embourgeoisement* of the working class in France, or the movement of people from the working class to the middle class. This movement occurs when the worker begins to afford and purchase more consumer goods, especially large purchases such as cars, refrigerators, vacations and other luxury goods, and the worker's standard of living increases. Now that the worker has more at stake they become less likely to risk losing these new lifestyle changes by going on strike. Singer explains that at this time a greater number of young people were faced with the possibility that they would miss out on the same middle class life style of their parents. Employment opportunities were decreasing and high national unemployment rates led to more and more people joining the search for work. Singer explains that these young people were less conformist and a bit more passionate than the generations before: "The newcomers refused to take their appointed places... They were not the nice boys and girls of the official fable, the socially obedient morons. Instead of just smashing chairs at a pop show, the new barbarians thought of smashing the regime."²⁰ These young people had witnessed their parents move up in social standing from working class to middle class and they were worried their place in society

²⁰ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 82, 106-108.

was beginning to slip away. This may have contributed to their involvement in the protests but another idea rooted in the protest was the belief that they were not the only members of society that should have access to a more comfortable lifestyle and opportunities for success. A central theme of the emerging student movement was the belief in equal opportunity for all members of society whether middle class, working class or farmers. The student protesters were especially concerned with opportunities available to working and lower class students, including the children of immigrants. They believed that the class based social structure was restricting opportunities for these students and they encouraged participation regardless of class, occupation or citizenship status. The importance of equality and community influenced the way the protests were organized.

The May protests changed the way social movements and political organizing was done and created a distinct separation between pre-1968 and post-1968 France. This divide occurred on a global level but for some nations, such as the United States, Prague and France, this moment became a marker in time and for nations such as these there is an idea of a pre-1968 world and a post-1968 world. As Suri explains, “1968 divides the ‘before’ from the ‘after,’ the world we lost from the world we gained.”²¹ The post-1968 world offered a new kind of social activism that emerged out of a new social environment. Geoff Eley explains that central themes of the European protests of 1968 were “direct action, community organizing, ideals of participation, smaller-scale nonbureaucratic forms, the stress on grassroots, the bringing of politics down to everyday life.” There was a push away from a top down political environment and a pull towards a bottom up movement. Eley suggests that this shift stemmed from the post-war cultural changes including a more detailed consumer society, a new youth subculture and greater expansion of universities. These cultural changes transformed the political stage and altered the

²¹ Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968*, xii.

way politics were done in France and around the world.²² Feenberg and Freedman recognize this political shift and believe that the 1968 social movements “transformed resistance to technocratic authority and consumer society from the notion of a few disgruntled literary intellectuals into a basis for a new kind of mass politics that continues to live in a variety of forms to this day.” The focus of the left moved from economic to cultural issues and Feenberg and Freedman argue these shifts can be seen in the future successes of the feminist and environmental movements. Using a variety of primary sources, including posters, tracts, manifestos and small press publications, which they catalogue in the second half of their book, Feenberg and Freedman describe the 1968 protests as a non-authoritarian peoples-cooperative movement fighting against the hierarchy of the state and capitalism. A central theme throughout the protests was the idea of community involvement and organizing collectively and cooperatively. The focus on community allowed people to take the time to get to know their neighbors and “find out what life was all about.” For example, during the *Night of Barricades* residents helped the protesting students by offering food, water and blankets. In some instances the residents even helped to hide fleeing protesters. Yet the idea of community cooperation went beyond just offering supplies and a place to hide and the success of the strike was dependant on the collectivity of those involved. The students were dependant on the workers to strike; the workers were dependant on the farmers for supplies; the life of the strike was dependant on the masses. The scale of the social movement was contingent on all the different sectors working together and the collectivity of the movement was paramount to its success.²³

The method used in organizing all these participants was different than protests past. *Autogestion* was the new form of politics which encouraged collective management, worker

²² Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 363-4.

²³ Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, 23, 30, 42 and 68.

control of production, and consensus based decision-making. Communist parties, such as the *Parti communiste français* (PCF), and unions, such as the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), were actively involved in the protest and strikes. However, organizations such as these were not at the center of this social movement because they were seen as having close relationships with both the government and big business. Since independent and non-authoritarian tactics were the foundation of this protest's structure, organizations such as these were marginalized. Eley explains that the May '68 event "was antistatist, the opposite of bureaucratic nationalization, and hostile to CGT unionism." The protesters and strikers organized action committees in order to facilitate collective decision-making instead of working within an already established hierarchy in a political party or union. "Action Committees attacked hierarchies and democratized decision-making." At the height of the strike there were 450 action committees that were established in factories, schools, offices, by transit workers and any other profession participating in the strike.²⁴ The protesters were not boxed and labeled by their specific political ideologies. Instead the action committees encouraged open participation and consensus based decision-making. When action committees began to pop up in factories the immigrant workers were encouraged to join and participate in the organization of the strikes by other workers. At the Citroën car factory immigrants organized action committees in order to work out solutions to problems with transportation, resistance to the poor working conditions in the factories, and to bring foreign and French workers together. "French language courses were organized in several centers after the workers organized themselves into committees and found classrooms in nearby student-occupied universities or in local culture centers."²⁵

²⁴ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 351.

²⁵ Fredy Perlman and Roger Gregoire, *Worker-Student Action Committees France May '68* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 1991), 30.

The role of immigrants in the 1968 protests has long been overlooked. Among the decades of analysis and anniversary publications there is a minimal portion of work available regarding immigrants. Ross believes that the more liberal political parties of pre-1968 France had avoided issues on immigration and that May 1968 was the moment when immigrants became more immersed in the political scene. Further, Ross argues that this is in part a result of the daily interactions and observations of university students and the immigrants living near their school in the *banlieue* of Nanterre.²⁶ The University of Nanterre was surrounded by factories and *bidonvilles* which were home for 10,000 Algerians who lived “among rats, mud, rags and misery.”²⁷ This meant that day in and day out the students from the university would move about the area witnessing the daily life of the immigrant residents and this contributed to later attempts at immigration reform from the left. The students who witnessed life in the *banlieue* of Nanterre brought their experiences with them as they worked for social justice in 1968 and in the years that followed. Concerning immigration Seidman disagrees with Ross stating that, “Immigrants seemed somewhat marginal,” and “Foreign workers often viewed the strike as a French work stoppage in which they played only a passive role.” He explains that French workers believed immigrant laborers were uninterested in union organizations and saw them as potential strikebreakers.²⁸ It is possible immigrants would have been wary and cautious of joining unions because they were vulnerable of losing work permits and the possibility of deportation.²⁹ Yet many immigrants did participate in the protests and the strikes, and the greater movement took up immigrant grievances and concerns.

²⁶ Ross, *May '68*, 95 – 96.

²⁷ Rob Kedward, *France and the French: A Modern History* (New York, NY: The Overlook Press, 2005), 409.

²⁸ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 174 and 230.

²⁹ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 86.

Posters as a Medium

Advancements in communication technology in the 1960s allowed people around the world to be more informed about international affairs than previous generations. New technologies, such as television and radio, allowed the facilitation and rapid movement of information and enabled people in one part of the world to learn about what people in another part of the world were doing more easily. These technologies helped to spread ideas and examples of other social movements that were occurring simultaneously all around the world. For instance, people in Prague could receive news, including images, of protests in the United States, and likewise the public in the United States could watch footage of the Vietnam War. This advancement in technology helped to motivate the organization of social disruptions around the world because it offered a glimpse at what other people in other social movements were doing at that moment. Suri points out that, “Particularly in 1968, the global media picked up on the rise of ‘youth culture’ and its challenge to established authority.”³⁰ A part of the new “youth culture” was the re-shaping and reforming of various mediums for propaganda. Besides television, other less mainstream and significantly less technical forms of propaganda were also being utilized to spread information and inspire action. Small-press publications were widely used throughout Europe to disseminate dissenting information. Likewise, the use of posters and graffiti gained rapid popularity as a form of propaganda, especially in France. The technological advances of television helped to spread information to the mainstream while the people in the social movements were utilizing simple, even sometimes primitive, medias to spread information at a more grassroots level. The use of more simple and low-tech methods of communication was

³⁰ Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968*, xii.

itself an act of protest against the consumer based society that used advanced and high-tech methods of communication.³¹

In France the first posters were designed in 1539 and since posters have been used as propaganda for many different reasons, including war, consumerism, and social awareness. In 1835, a law was passed in France outlawing the use of images in posters because the images could influence the audience into action, but for the most part contemporary posters function as a visual representations of the message making them easy to understand and easily accessible to the masses.³² Paris streets have long been covered with posters that advertise products or serve as political propaganda. Throughout the late 1800s and first half of the 1900s advertisers of products from the colonies often used images of indigenous people and these images often contained racial stereotypes and embellishments. French propaganda posters made during World War II were riddled with anti-Semitism and often promoted strict family and patriotic values.³³ During the protests of May 1968 the students usurped this medium and reclaimed the commercial and governmental space in order to post radical and political art.

Many different groups of people designed and printed posters. Since there was no central “leadership” the production of art and information was completed in an anarchistic manner by many different individuals as well as various groups of people. The most recognized group that facilitated the creation of the posters was the *Atelier populaire*. The *Atelier* was founded on May 8 when students from the *Beaux-arts* joined other striking students and, on May 14, occupied the art facility to print the first poster. The *Atelier* shared the general grievances with the greater

³¹ It is also interesting to note that television and radio employees joined in the strike by limiting programming “and depriving the government of its most effective instrument of persuasion.” Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Street*, 29.

³² Margaret Collins Weitz, “Art in the Service of Propaganda,” *Religion and the Arts* 4, no. 1 (2000): 43-44.

³³ For more on colonial advertising and representations of the colonies see Danna S. Hale “French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic,” in Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). And for more on World War II propaganda posters see Collins Weitz, “Art in the Service of Propaganda.”

striking student body but they also had their own unique objectives and desires as laid out in a statement printed in the June issue of a small press publication titled *Cahier de mai*. In concurrence with the greater “umbrella” movement of student strikers, the *Atelier* believed the university system was class based and practiced “social selection,” carried out through a system of exams. They also believed that the people who suffered the most were the children of poor farmers and the working class. Further, they were against teaching practices that they saw as failing to promote critical understanding of socio-economic realities. The greater student body was opposed to the elevated position of intellectuals in society but the concerns of the *Atelier* expanded further on this subject and included a critique of the relationship between bourgeois artists and the rest of society, particularly the working class. The *Atelier* believed the “ruling class” intentionally attributed to artists and academics to a privileged status in society in order to isolate them from the working class. They saw this as a physical separation as well as a form of class segregation and believed there should be no barriers separating any class of people from art and culture.³⁴ The greater body of student strikers wanted to break down the class structure and live in a more egalitarian society, and the *Atelier* wanted to specifically work on tearing down the walls that separated the art world from the workers.

The *Atelier* was comprised of striking students, professional artists (many from a group called the *Jeunes peintres*, Young Painters) and striking workers.³⁵ A leaflet printed by a *Beaux-arts* strike committee explains, “These posters, made collectively with no ‘big names,’ try to show what a popular art can be—that is, an art that is at the service of the people.”³⁶ The *Atelier*

³⁴ “Document: L’atelier populaire.” *Les Cahier de Mai* 2 (July 1-15, 1968), 14-16. <http://edocs.lib.sfu.ca/cgi-bin/Mai68?Display=971> (accessed July 16, 2009). A translation of this document can be found in Feenberg, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, 139-145.

³⁵ Immigrants were likely involved in poster making in one way or another through their growing participation in the strikes (as described later), however there is no direct mention of immigrant participation.

³⁶ Alian Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The French Student Uprising November 1967-June 1968 an Analytical Record*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 572.

functioned in a collective and consensus-based manner. A general assembly was established and together the participants would decide on a design and the poster would be printed.³⁷ There were two criteria for the posters to be printed: first, the political idea of the poster must be just and second, the poster must clearly transmit this idea.³⁸ At first the posters were made using a technique called lithography, which is the process of making a print using an etched hard surface to transfer the image to a second surface. The *Atelier* members soon learned it was easier and faster to use the process of serigraphy, or screen-printing, which is the process of transferring a negative image to a screen that is then used in a similar fashion as a stencil. The first poster had three big letter “U”s on the left hand side and the three words: “*Usines, Universités, Union,*” (factories, universities and union).³⁹



Image 2: Usines, Universités, Union⁴⁰

Initially, the posters were to be hung up in a gallery for sale but instead they were impulsively hung on the walls of the city streets.⁴¹ The poster was no longer a tool of the bourgeois notion of art; it would not hang on the walls of a gallery (at least not until later). The

³⁷ Gervereau, “L’atelier populaire,” 185.

³⁸ Laurent Gervereau. “Les affiches de ‘mai 68’,” *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 11, no. 1 (1988): 162.

³⁹ Gervereau, “Les affiches,” 165-166.

⁴⁰ Wlassikoff, *Mai ’68*, 26 and 48.

⁴¹ Gervereau, “L’atelier populaire,” 184.

poster took on a new life, and became something far more influential: it became the recognized radical visual symbol of the May 1968 social movement. According to art historian Michel Wlassikoff, “Previously accepted rules of communication were challenged by the efficiency of graffiti ... and by the impact of posters produced by the workshops,” and further, the artists, “shattered conventions and hierarchies, and sparked long-term debates within educational establishments.”⁴² In the beginning of the production the subject matter of the posters were mainly pro-worker-student solidarity and anti-Gaullist government. Many of the posters contained statements against the current political regime or were calls for solidarity with factory workers and other striking institutions. According to Ross, “of the hundreds of posters produced in the popular studio of the *Beaux-arts* school, almost none... makes an allusion to the existence of a student movement; almost everyone is inscribed within the political struggle against the Gaullist regime and in a rhetoric of solidarity with workers.”⁴³ While Seidman feels the overall significance of May was nominal he does believe the posters are a “striking and enduring cultural legacy” of the May protests and that the posters are a reflection of the “*ouvriériste*” or worker centric political focuses of the social movement such as “corporatism, liberalism, internationalism, antifascism, anti-imperialism, and anticapitalism.”⁴⁴

The designs and slogans continue to hold lasting meaning as a representation of the 1968 protest and now act as a symbol of this moment in time. The first posters produced focused on general themes of the protests and it was not until later in May that we begin to see posters addressing immigrants and issues related to immigrant rights. This reflects the progression of the events of May protests and shows that in the beginning greater focus was placed on

⁴² Michel Wlassikoff, *The Story of Graphic Design in France* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2005), 215-6.

⁴³ Ross, *May '68*, 206-207.

⁴⁴ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 130.

overarching themes and as the unrest continued the participants began to focus on more precise issues such as immigration and the feminist movement.

Les travailleurs unis & des citoyens

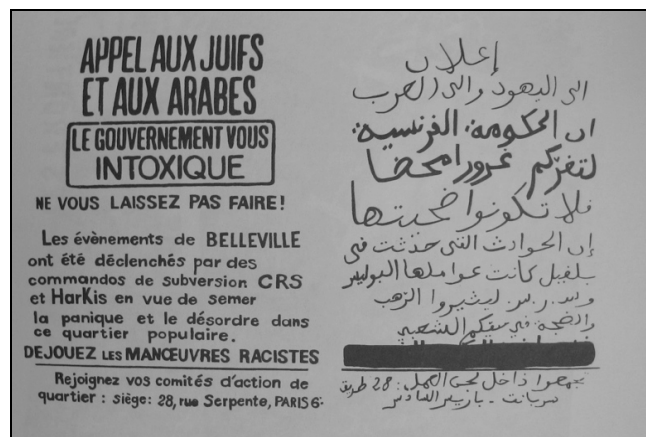


Image 3: Appel aux Juifs et aux Arabes ⁴⁵

Throughout the protests camaraderie and solidarity were central themes and were often expressed in the posters. For the most part, no one group of immigrants was singled out in the posters created and designed during the 1968 protests. However, one poster specifically addressed the Arab and Jewish populations residing in the neighborhood of Belleville.⁴⁶ This poster was printed in response to potential violence surrounding the anniversary of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. This poster explains that the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS, French riot police) and the *Harki* were attempting to incite disruptions, “sow panic and disorder,” and split the Arab and Jewish residents further against each other. *Harki* is a term used to classify an Algerian who sided with and aided the French during the Algerian war

⁴⁵ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 163.

⁴⁶ Wlassikoff, *Mai '68*, 119.

for independence, and later upon immigrating to France they sometimes worked for the police.⁴⁷

The designers of the poster were appealing to the community encouraging them to unite and work together in solidarity for a peaceful neighborhood and to not be negatively influenced by provocateurs.

This poster's reference to previous strikes and protests along with the mention of the *Harkis* and agent provocateurs brings to memory the Algerian War and the Algerian organized protests of October 1961. The October 1961 protests were organized in response to growing harassment from police including daily identification checks, armed patrols in Algerian neighborhoods, a curfew that was aimed strictly at Algerians, vandalism to Algerian owned establishments, physical abuses and the demolition of *bidonvilles* (shanty towns).⁴⁸ This protest was to last three days. On the first day Algerians participated in a march through the center of Paris and vigil after the curfew hours, on the second day there was a work stoppage strike and the third day was a protest of women and children. During this protest 105 participants were killed and many more were victims of the violence.⁴⁹ This organized protest received little attention and was not explicitly discussed during the 1968 protests and, further, was not officially recognized by the state until 1999.

During the May '68 protests a second incident related to the Algerian War was evoked more often than the October 1961 protests. In February 1962, eight people, including one child and three women, were trampled to death at a communist organized anti-*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS) protest.⁵⁰ The victims were killed near the Charonne métro stop while trying to escape the advancing and baton-wielding police. During the 1968 strikes some

⁴⁷ House, *Paris 1961*, 77.

⁴⁸ House, *Paris 1961*, 73, 80-82, and 98-99. Ross, *May '68*, 53-55.

⁴⁹ House, *Paris 1961*, 106-107, 113-115, 125 and 127.

⁵⁰ The OAS was a notorious organization of armed French citizen who used terrorist tactics, such as bombings, in France and Algeria because they wanted Algeria to remain French. Kedward, *France and the French*, 344-345.

protesters attempted show a connection between the violence that took place during the Charonne incident and the violence they were experiencing. The Charonne event was referred to in some graffiti, at least one poster and discussed in leaflets, but like the 1961 Algerian organized protests, this incident was still rarely mentioned outside of these examples.⁵¹

Jim House and Neil MacMaster explain that in May 1968 there was little mention of the October 1961 protests perhaps because the participants in the 1968 protests would have been too young in 1961 to remember the events and it is possible older generations did not pass this memory on to the younger. This holds true since there was only a “shadow trace” of these events during the 1968 uprising.⁵² In 1968, the majority of the protesting students came from white middle class families and it is possible that their parents were only somewhat more likely to pass on the memory of the Charonne events –the repression of white communists– rather than the October 17 events –the killing of Muslim Algerians– because of a perceived distance separating them from the participants of the latter event.



⁵¹ Schnapp, *The French Student Revolt*, 169, 183 and 187.

⁵² House, *Paris 1961*, 281.

Image 4: Travailleurs Français immigrés tous unis ⁵³

Some of the posters shown here were created to promote and spread the theme of social and political equality to immigrants, yet they also show the limitations the participants faced. “*Travailleurs Français Immigrés Tous Unis*,” (French immigrant workers united), reads a poster that was silk screened by the *Atelier*, at the request of the Citroën car factory strikers, and posted around May 22. This poster does not contain any images. Under this first statement the poster repeats the phrase, “*A travail égal salaire égal*,” (Equal work for equal pay) in seven languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Serbian, and Arabic, in that order. Immigrants in France came from many different regions notably the ones used in this poster. Immigrants were a growing demographic in France during the second half of the twentieth century. The post World War II population of France was not enough to satisfy the labor needs to rebuild the country and the French work force was dependant on immigrant workers to fill the shortages. France, like many other European countries, turned toward their colonial interests in order to subsidize the labor forces and often encouraged immigration for employment. The French government established the National Immigration Office (ONI) in 1945 in order to facilitate the recruitment and hiring process of immigrants. The ONI was not funded by the state but by fees paid by employers who used the ONI services. In order to avoid paying for the ONI services employers sought immigrant workers independently and sometimes would even hire undocumented workers or *sans papier*.⁵⁴ This contributed to the virtually unregulated immigration practices during the years when France was desperate for laborers. The total immigrant population was just over 5.28% of the population of France in 1968. In the decade following World War II, neighboring countries, such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, accounted for

⁵³ Wlassikoff, *Mai* ‘68, 29 and 62.

⁵⁴ Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and citizenship in modern France* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 38-40.

the greatest number of immigrants coming into France. In 1968, the population of Spanish expatriates living in France was 607,000 and the number of Portuguese immigrants was 296,000. The population of North African immigrants also rapidly grew in the post World War II years, particularly immigrants from Algeria. The post World War II, the population of Algerian immigrants in France was 22,000. In 1954, that number grew to 210,000.⁵⁵

The seven languages used in the poster are representative of the predominant immigrant populations in France at the time. The order in which the languages are used in this poster could represent several things. First, this could be a reflection of what was seen as the predominant immigrant populations. France encouraged immigration after World War II in order to bolster population and to increase the available labor in the work force. During this time there was much debate over the methods the state would use to further immigration efforts. There was a clear emphasis on promoting European immigration rather than immigration from Africa or Asia. The ONI established offices in neighboring countries such as Italy while avoiding other nations.⁵⁶ It is possible the French state was trying not to openly promote immigration from former colonies in hopes of avoiding the complicated relationship of the formerly colonized and colonizer. At this time there would have statistically been a greater number of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese immigrants in France. The order could have also represented an ingrained social hierarchy surrounding immigrants in France. France has long prided itself on being a nation of equality, a quality that finds its roots in the republican ideals of the French Revolution. During the Revolution separation from the state was frowned upon; loyalty and unity were central to the

⁵⁵ Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'race' and ethnicity in contemporary France* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 8-14. The high number of Algerian immigrants was a result of the unique relationship shared by France and Algeria. France occupied Algeria from 1830-1962 but never considered it a colony. Instead Algeria was an extension of the French nation. People were able to more easily move between the two countries and this allowed Algerians to immigrate to France to find work. See Kedward, *France and the French*, 410.

⁵⁶ Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'race' and ethnicity*, 10-11.

French State. As Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader explain, there was no room for individual differences since “revolutionaries insisted on the irrelevance of religious, ethnic, or racial difference in the exercise of rights.”⁵⁷ In order to achieve equality all must be the same. Therefore, in order to be French one is expected to assimilate to the French culture and society. This notion has complicated the relationship between France and immigrants in France and immigrants often have a difficult time finding acceptance in France because of the French insistence on complete assimilation. The order of the language groups used in the poster could be a representation of a perceived hierarchy of those immigrants who were thought to more easily assimilate to the French way of life. For instance, it was believed that an immigrant from a neighboring, or European, country would be able to more easily assimilate since they share certain cultural traits with France such as religion, family structures and perhaps even region similarities in food. Yet it was assumed someone from North Africa with a much more different culture and background would have a more difficult time assimilating to the French way of life. In many instances foreign workers lacked the opportunity or resources to learn French. During the worker occupation of factories French language lessons were organized with the help of the striking students.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader ed., *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 2.

⁵⁸ Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committee*, 18.



Image 5: Immigrant workers in France unite.⁵⁹

We can see a further example of this linguistic and social hierarchy in a similar poster. This poster reads, “Immigrant Workers in France Unite,” and is written in three languages: Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. This poster is of particular interest because of the choice of the designer to leave out the French language. Since this poster was designed, printed and distributed by the *Atelier* it is interesting to consider their motivation behind their use of language. The poster is calling for the cooperation of immigrants from these three specific language groups, independent of French intervention. French was a language that these immigrant groups all could have had in common and potentially could have been a uniting medium for immigrants from various regions. Yet French was left out. Perhaps the French language was omitted because it was the language of the bosses, the landlords, the police, the state, the oppressor. Using these three different and foreign languages could have unified the immigrants together in their struggle against the French social hierarchy.

⁵⁹ Wlassikoff, *Mai* '68, 41.

However, it is possible that these posters are in fact more similar than they first appear and maintain the same premise as the first poster of this essay, "*Travailleurs Unis.*" These posters are using a new tactic by shifting the audience from the general French worker or student to the immigrant population themselves. Up until this point, the subject of many of the posters focused on statements against the Gaullist government and capitalism and was pro-worker solidarity and collective organizing. Both of the posters encouraging worker unity, however, are deliberately directing their message to the immigrant working class asserting that this struggle is their struggle. These posters show that the protests and strikes were not only a venue for the white working-class French to fight for a more decent life but for the immigrant worker to fight for equal opportunity as well. Further, these posters advocate for solidarity among the workers. One calls for the unification of the immigrant workers while the other advocates unification among all workers.

These posters did not radicalize and immediately change society; in fact these posters are examples of some of the inherent limitations of the May protests. Even while fighting for equality the immigrants were inadvertently dependant on the French. The idea of a language hierarchy is one example of the limits the activists faced and shows that even in the attempt to foster equality there was more work to be done. Since the posters were made primarily by French students or French workers it is important to consider that in the attempt to unify immigrants they perpetuated the social hierarchy and since they were the primary producers this furthered the idea of immigrants as the "other." While some immigrants likely worked with the *Atelier* there is little mention of their participation specifically and they would have been far outnumbered by the participants of the French students and workers.

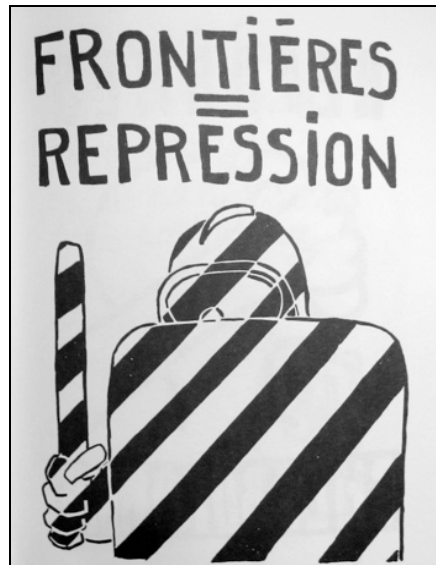


Image 6: Frontières = Répression⁶⁰

In response to the growing state pressure specifically focused on immigrants and the general increase of deportations another selection of posters were designed in defense of immigrant rights. “*Frontières = Répression*” (Borders = Repression), reads one poster designed in response to the growing concern about deportations. This poster features an image of a police officer with a shield and baton raised and across the top. The image from this poster was also used to announce a demonstration to be held on Wednesday, June 12 and reads “*Il est recommandé aux étrangers de ne pas participer,*” (It is recommended that foreigners do not participate).⁶¹ This statement is of particular interest because it singles out foreigners and asks them not to participate in a demonstration specifically concerning borders. It is clear the organizers of the demonstration feared the potential for violent disruptions since in the past there had been violent outbursts at protests involving foreigners. Protesters may have desired to underline non-immigrant support for immigrant rights. At the same time it is possible this was an example of the lingering paternalistic tendencies of a colonial power over the formerly

⁶⁰ Wlassikoff, *Mai* 68, 30 and 65.

⁶¹ Wlassikoff, *Mai* ‘68, 30.

colonized. This statement is another example of the limitations the protesters faced while trying to promote social change. Even in the midst of working towards social equality for immigrants, organizers of this particular demonstration desired segregation.



Image 7: L'Union⁶²

Two more posters were designed in response to the increased deportations. One poster reads, "*Halte à l'expulsion de nos camarades étrangers,*" (Stop the deportation of our foreign comrades) and the other poster reads, "*L'union de tous les travailleurs, Brisera les frontières,*" (The union of all workers will break the borders) and has the image of a piece of barbed wire fence with a crack down the center. As the number of foreign participants at the protests and strikes grew through the month of May the pressure and threat of deportation grew as well.⁶³ Using police records, it is Seidman who offers some interesting statistics on immigrant arrests and deportations despite his belief that they only played a passive and marginal role in the events as a whole. Between May 24 and June 6, the French state deported 183 in connection to their participation in the protests. On May 3, 544 people were detained at protests and 58 were

⁶² Wlassikoff, *Mai* 68, 41 and 120.

⁶³ Wlassikoff, *Mai* 68, 41.

foreigners. On May 7, out of the 462 arrests 82 were foreigners. During protests that took place over the night of May 23-24, 186 people were arrested, 44 were foreign. This is between 10 and 24 percent of those involved in the protest.⁶⁴ These numbers show that there was a growing and significant representation of immigrants involved in the protest and strikes in the latter half of May and into June. As the protests carried on and the amount of participants grew, more immigrants joined the masses.

Chez moi

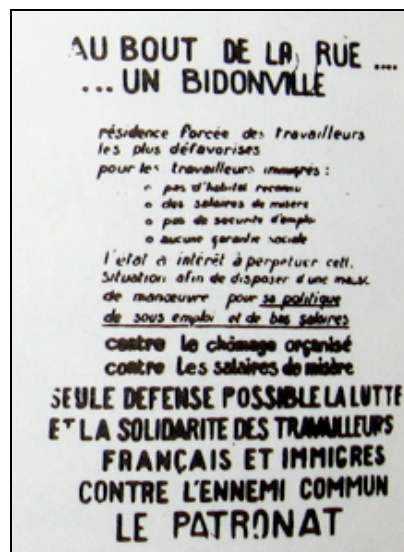


Image 8: Au bout de la rue⁶⁵

Alongside the growing immigrant population and their rights as workers the issue of where immigrants lived was a growing concern in French society and were expressed during the 1968 protests. The housing options available to immigrants were often sub-standard, unsafe and dirty. One poster directly address workers rights and housing sates, “*Au bout de la rue...un bidonville,*” (At the end of the road... a slum), and is followed by a description of the inequalities

⁶⁴ Seidman, *Imaginary Revolution*, 96, 104, 183 and 247.

⁶⁵ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 162.

the immigrant worker faced such as having no social guarantees, no job security and earning poverty wages. The bottom half of the poster states that underemployment and poverty wages were part of a cycle that the state and the employer jointly perpetuate. The only solution is for the French and immigrant workers to unite against the employer and the state together.⁶⁶

Throughout the protests the students and the workers were struggling against the unfair and demeaning class system in France. The immigrant's situation was a distinct representation of the flaws in this system. Immigrants were not afforded the same privileges as the rest of society because they were among the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Immigrants were unable to receive an equal wage for the work they did, their housing options suffered and future generations would struggle to climb out of this slump.

Public housing was a growing interest among the protesters. It was not considered the responsibility of the state to arrange public housing options for low-income residence. Instead it was often thought to be the responsibility of the employer to work out housing arrangements.⁶⁷ In the simplest terms, the housing that was available for immigrants can be broken down to three options. The plainest and least expensive choice for lodging was often the *hôtel de passage*. This was basically a transient hotel, also known as a hostel or a *foyer*, and usually only consisted of a small room for rent. As Paul A. Silverstein points out, "They often lacked running water and proper sanitary facilities, and, as their upkeep was purely at the discretion of the employers, they were equally unscrupulous."⁶⁸ Men would sometimes share a room and take turns sleeping in shifts in order to save more money to send back home. The Citroën car factory managed one such dormitory located in the industrial suburb of Villiers-le-Bel which was described in one

⁶⁶ Wlassikoff, *Mai '68*, 32.

⁶⁷ House, *Paris 1961*, 62-3.

⁶⁸ Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 90.

article printed in July 1968. At this dormitory “the workers live in forty-eight apartments with fourteen people in each two-or-three-room apartment. The assignment of workers to apartments is done arbitrarily. Thus Yugoslavs are housed together with Spanish and Portuguese workers.”⁶⁹ The next option was to reside in a *bidonville* or shantytown. These areas became more and more prevalent after World War II and were generally built in areas that were abandoned. Silverstein explains that the *bidonvilles* were often a more enticing option for families perhaps because they were usually organized according to place of origin.⁷⁰ According to the Interior Minister, in the 1960s, 46,827 people were living in rundown *bidonvilles*.⁷¹ The *bidonville* at Champigny was home to 14,000 people alone. Low-income housing projects or *habitation à loyer modéré* (HLM) were often the next option for immigrant housing. Between the 1950s and the 1970s a massive reconstruction campaign was carried out when over one million new HLM were built in Paris and the surrounding areas and most of these projects took place between 1965 and 1970.⁷² This can be seen as a result of the population increase following the end of the Algerian war for independence. In the six-month period near the end the war from April to September 1962 nearly one million people migrated from Algeria to France. Most were French citizens, however, there was a significant population of *Harkis* who also migrated to France during this exodus.⁷³ During the transition from *bidonvilles* to HLM many people were housed in temporary housing. According to one leaflet created during the May 1968 strike, “In France, more than three million men, women, and children- French sub-proletarians or immigrant workers- live in emergency housing, miserable neighborhoods, and shanty towns.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees*, 30.

⁷⁰ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 91-92.

⁷¹ House, *Paris 1961*, 97.

⁷² Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 89-94.

⁷³ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 207.

⁷⁴ Schnapp, *The French Student Uprising*, 433.

It comes as no surprise that the students found the living conditions available to immigrants appalling and focus some of their poster propaganda on bring to light the issues surrounding these conditions.

Immigrant workers were segregated from the rest of the city and society physically and socially. Concerning housing they were only able to find residence in certain neighborhoods often located in the outer suburbs and away from the city center. “As the lowest paid workers, Algerians tended to settle in the zones of slums tenement housing in an outer ring of poor arrondissements... or the industrial suburbs to the north and north-west of the city.”⁷⁵ These neighborhoods were usually on the outskirts of the city itself and located in the *banlieues*. Early in the nineteenth century, Paris began to rapidly grow and the population was pushed further out into the surrounding areas and as the city grew it fused with the surrounding *banlieues*.⁷⁶ During this time, the *banlieues* developed in different ways. Some *banlieues* were areas of commerce, or concentrated with factories. Other times they were areas of upper-class residence and still other areas were working-class housing experiments. Silverstein explains that a study done in the 1920s showed there were concentrated pockets of Algerian immigrants living in the southern suburbs of Paris. According to this study these immigrants mainly worked in factories in the northern suburbs of Paris resulting in very long commutes. Not only did this mean immigrants were physically pushed to the outside they were also socially marginalized.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ House, *Paris 1961*, 63.

⁷⁶ Richard L. Derderian, *North Africans in Contemporary France: Becoming Visible* (New York, NY: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2004), 147.

⁷⁷ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 89.

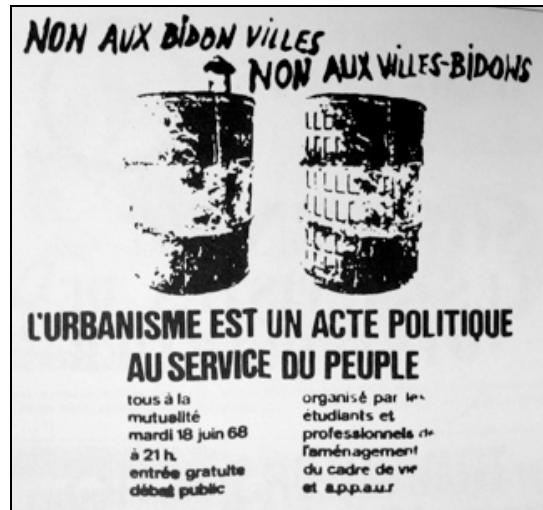


Image 9: Non aux bidon villes ⁷⁸

Two posters were designed announcing a public debate concerning housing which was organized by *Les étudiants et professionnels de l'aménagement du cadre de vie*, but it is unclear who produced these posters. The designer uses a play-on-words to show the sad state of urban housing trends of the time. Across the top the posters read, “*Non aux bidonvilles, Non aux villes-bidons.*” In French a *bidonville* is a shantytown or a slum. A *bidon* can be translated as a container like a can or a drum and *villes* means city. The imagery in one of these posters is distinct. There is an image of what looks like two oil drums one with windows and the other with a water tower or smoke stack on top. The artist here is trying to convey that the housing slums are the equivalent to trash and as undesirable as a used up oil can. The poster reads, “No, to city slums, No, to slum cities.”⁷⁹ The layout for another poster announcing the same public debate on housing concerns is completely different. There are no images on this poster and the look is very professional with clean lines and letters and nice form.⁸⁰ Since this poster has a very professional appearance it is safe to say the audience may have been slightly different from the

⁷⁸ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 162.

⁷⁹ Schnapp, *The French Student Uprising*, 569.

⁸⁰ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 162.

audience of the other poster. This poster would have appealed to the greater population and those who may not have been directly participating in the strike in order to encourage them to participate in the debate and discuss the issues surrounding housing. The organizers of the event were attempting to facilitate the establishment of a closer community, a theme that runs throughout these protests. In creating two posters with different approaches they were able to successfully appeal to a greater demographic and encourage participation from a greater portion of the population.

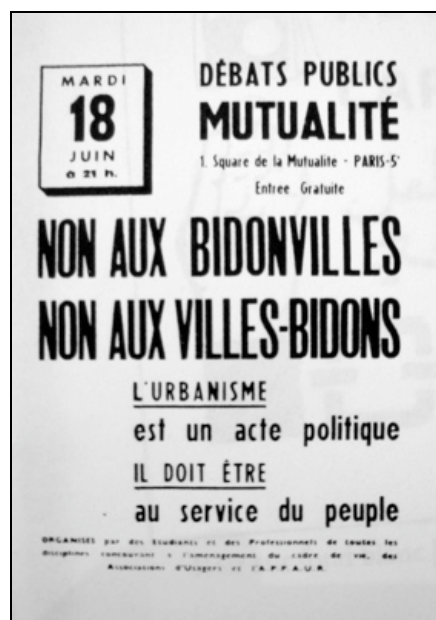


Image 10: Débats publics mutualité⁸¹

The *Beaux-arts* students were increasingly concerned with the changes to the world of architecture and when the *Atelier* was founded one of their main grievances was the future work of architects. The architectural students from the *Beaux-arts* did not want to be forced to participate in building failing housing projects.⁸² They believed that the practices behind these complexes were detrimental to the safety of the residence and diminished the importance of

⁸¹ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 162.

⁸² "Document: L'atelier populaire," 14-16.

architecture in the art community. The architectural students expressed their concern of becoming the “watchdog of the bourgeoisie,” in a leaflet printed on June 10 which explains, “Architects who have worked in so-called ‘low income’ housing, who have awarded contracts to the lowest bidders, who reduce the habitable surface to lower the ceiling price; or the urbanists [*sic*] who, by zoning, have increased social segregation, know this is true.”⁸³ They were uninterested in participating in the intellectual hierarchy promoted by the state. The architects believed architecture should remain an art form and that people deserved to work and live in safe and stable conditions. In the next poster printed by the *Atelier* and designed by the *Comité interprofessionnel du bâtiment* the message is that of the physical losses incurred in the construction of low-income housing projects.⁸⁴ The poster features the silhouette of a person with their arm in a sling and states that 340,885 construction workers were injured. Next, there is a person missing a leg showing there were 32,770 who suffered from the loss of a limb. And finally, there is a coffin showing there were 850 deaths.⁸⁵ This poster expresses housing, urban design and inadequate labor practices as life and death issues.

⁸³ Schnapp, *The French Student Uprising*, 571.

⁸⁴ Wlassikoff, *Mai '68*, 29.

⁸⁵ It is not stated whether these numbers are a representation of injuries and losses suffered each year or if these statistics cover multiple years.

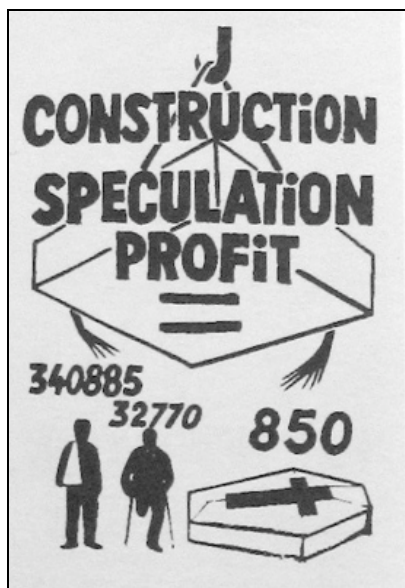


Image 11: Construction spéculation profit ⁸⁶

These posters demonstrate that the students and workers took up a set of concerns, including workers rights and the right to adequate housing. Striking factory workers recognized that the immigrant laborers who worked alongside them were being mistreated and were experiences multiple forms of discrimination ranging from wage concerns to inadequate housing options. Student strikers, such as the students from the school of architecture, were greatly concerned with changing the way immigrants and their concerned were viewed by the greater public.

Conclusion

In the years prior to the 1968 movement, immigrant issues trickled into public discourse. Yet the events of 1968 were different in that they acted as a popular movement that included a broad range of people from many facets of society who were not solely activists or politically

⁸⁶ Gasquet, *500 Affiches*, 190.

active people. A vast portion of the population participated in the protests and nearly the entire nation was affected in one way or another. The social movement that took place in May 1968 tore down previously conceived notions of political organizing and played a role in the rearrangement of social priorities.

As examined here, the poster was a particularly important tool used in the protests. The use of posters to spread propaganda and inform the greater populations was truly significant because of their egalitarian production and ability to reach a broad range of people. When the worker and student coalitions, particularly the *Atelier populaire*, designed and circulated posters focused on immigrant issues they were able to bring these topics into popular French discourse. Through the language and imagery of the primitively produced posters, average French people learned about the hardships and trials of the immigrant's situation. Further, the posters helped to unify and empower the immigrant community to work together against the oppressive situations and restraints they faced. This would not have been possible if it were not for the enormity of the greater social movement that was taking place at the time. Other protests had been arranged and immigrant organizations existed but they lacked the scale and degree to which this movement included the general public. The Nanterre student strikers were more aware of the concerns of the immigrant population because they were constantly observing the living conditions in the *banlieue* where they attended classes. As the strikes and protests grew in size, more immigrants joined the masses, and the students were able to bring these concerns to the greater student movement. Factory workers and student groups facilitated the organizing of collectives to help immigrants with issues ranging from transportation to language classes. The interest of the striking workers and the participation of foreigners further contributed to communicating the issues concerning immigrants to the greater public who were participating in

or affected by the general strike. Once the issues were established and the participants were empowered the momentum continued beyond the May 1968 events. May 1968 continues to be seen as a defining moment and a turning point in French history. For immigrants and immigration reform, May 1968 acted as a dividing moment where the issues entered into popular French social and political discourse with more force than in previous years. The posters examined in this paper are one example of this exposure and show that workers and students were recognizing the need to incorporate immigration reform into their desires for social equality.

The issues concerning immigrants were not eliminated in the post-1968 world; in fact the issues brought up during the 1968 protests are many of the same concerns immigrants in France face today. Today immigration remains a constant public issue and there are many groups and organizations that continue to fight and struggle for equal rights and opportunity for immigrants. While many of these organizations continue to use posters as a method to inform the public they are also exploring a multitude of advancements in communication technology in order to inform the public and continue the struggle for immigrant rights.

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