

The naturalization of the British immigrants in eighteenth century France

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The aim of this article is to analyze the conditions conducive to obtaining the status of subject in France and the narrative strategies employed for the purpose of obtaining *lettres de naturalité* by immigrants from the British Isles during the eighteenth century, in order to examine what being legally bound to the state signified for foreigners under the Ancien Régime.

Having arrived in France for political, religious and/or economic reasons and by and large favorably received by the king (or, royal authority), the British immigrants became participants in French society through participation and solidarity in such compatriotic communities as the Stuart court in exile in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Irish regiments in the French Army, British-founded convents and colleges, and merchants' colonies in the Atlantic seaports.

It's within this process of socialization that the naturalization was requested, and by analysis of the organizational features of those naturalized in terms of geographical distribution and socioprofessional profiles, the author concludes from her observations on their motives and backgrounds that the choice of naturalization was indirectly facilitated by the historical relations and cultural bonds between immigrant communities and French society and influenced by wavering inbred Stuart loyalties and political persecution, but was directly decided out of the desire to guarantee one's personal property and/or occupation. That being said, such self-serving motives were by no means revealed in the actual *lettres de naturalité*; rather, one observes applicants adopting such strategies designed to more easily obtain these letters as insisting that they were endowed with many of the exemplary attributes sought after within French society. From the personal accounts included in the *lettres de naturalité* of British immigrants, we find the enumeration of such desirable national attributes as contributions made to the monarchy through military,

medical and commercial service and religious orthodoxy, while at the same time there are accounts of their everyday occupational activities, touching upon past personal experiences of loyalty to the House of Stuart, apostasy and conversion to the Catholicism and the religious persecution they suffered in their homeland. All indicate clearly the adoption of strategies geared to taking advantage of their “otherness” as foreign-born residents.

From the above analysis, the author makes the general conclusion that naturalization not only constitutes an expansion in the breadth of alternative strategies for survival within the foreigners’ host society, but at the same time did not presume full assimilation into French culture; rather allowing them to preserve their identity with the historical and cultural heritage of their native lands.