

Fueling the Fire

The Backdraft of the
French Riots of 2005

Senior Honors Project

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AP PHOTO

Intent

As a an American studying in Saint Etienne, France during the fall of 2005, I was completely captivated by the French riots that began in the suburbs of Paris and quickly multiplied across the country to reveal much more than a set of disgruntled citizens. Just like a moth to the flame, I was mesmerized by this event and wanted to dissect the riots in order to reveal their true anatomy.

These riots represent a cultural phenomenon that Americans, in my opinion, truly cannot understand. At the time, I did not comprehend the meaning of what was happening and why the French citizens rebelled with such an uprising that would eventually expose the underlying problems of the country that I had previously only studied in textbooks.

I consider this project to be a visual examination of the events that took place from mid-October to the end of December. What began as a process to determine the American bias in media contrasted with the portrayal of the incidents in France evolved into a photo essay that illustrates the actual events and how they were handled. As a result, I now have a better understanding of what I witnessed.

The study begins on October 19 and progresses with significant incidents that transpire over the following days. The photos demonstrate the evolution of the riots, beginning with somewhat peaceful manifestations, followed by a violent backdraft, and eventually simmering to a manageable calm.

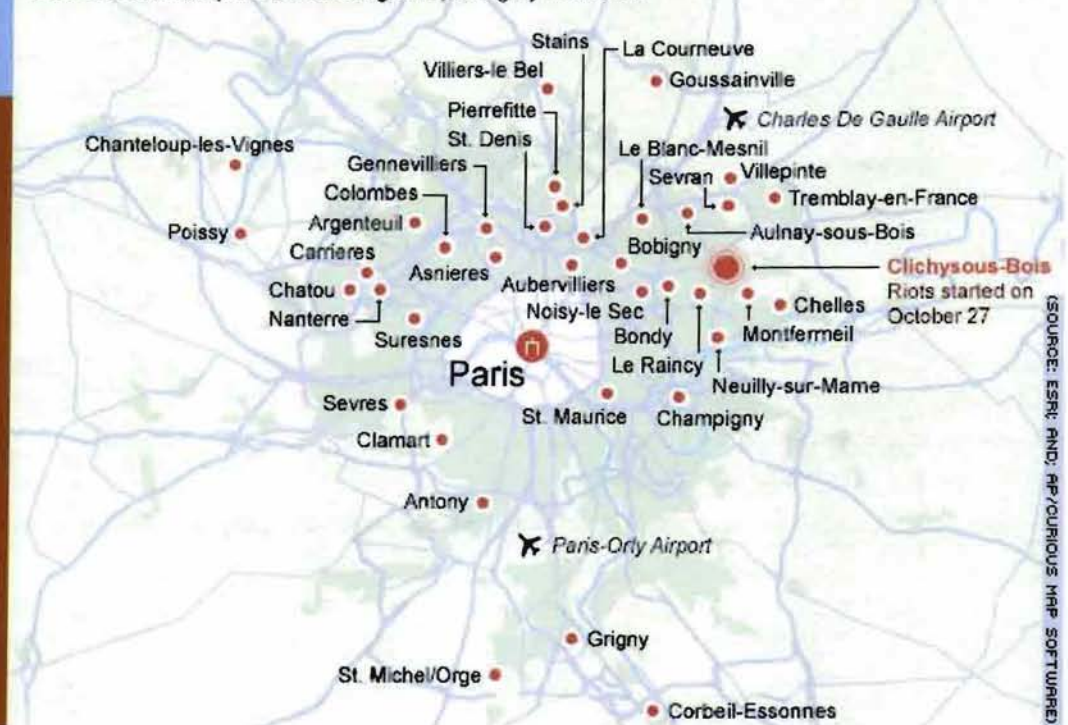


▶ France

Eventually, the riots mushroomed from the suburbs of Paris to all of France.

Paris ◀

NOTE: Most sites plotted according to reporting by Le Monde





October 19

- Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy declares a “war without mercy” on violence in the suburbs.
- In reference to the “at-risk” suburbs, Sarkozy says, "I've said they have to be cleaned -- we're going to make them as clean as a whistle," he tells regional police chiefs.

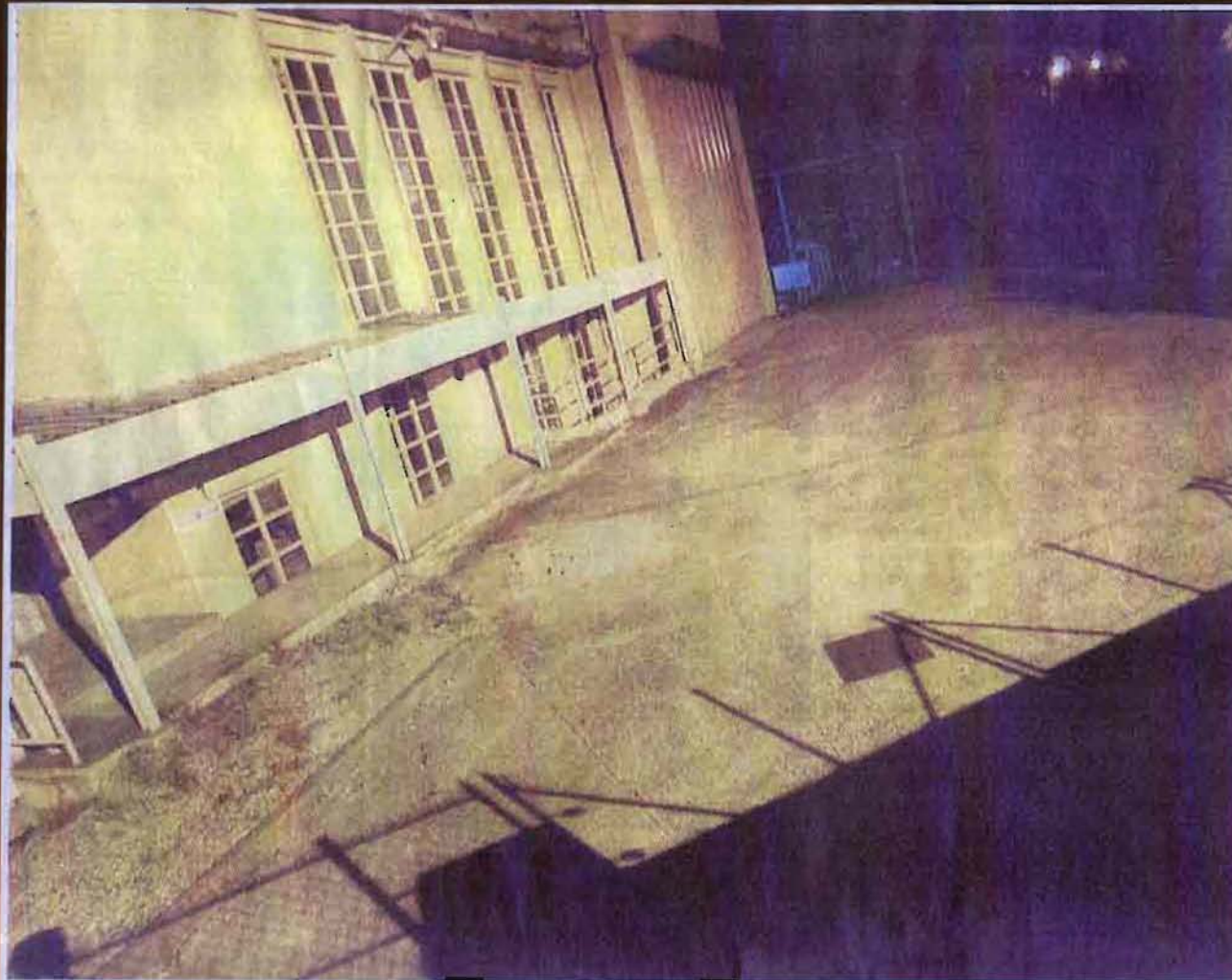
October 25

- During a visit to the Paris suburb of Argenteuil, Sarkozy is pelted with stones and bottles. He describes rebellious youths in such districts as “rabble”.



October 27

- Two boys in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, Bouna Traore, a 15 year old, and Zyed Benna, a 17 year old, flee a police identity check. They scale the wall of an electrical relay station and are electrocuted as they try to hide near a transformer. Youths in the suburb, hearing of the deaths, go on a rampage, burning 23 vehicles and vandalizing buildings and hurling stones and bottles at riot police.



Le transformateur EDF à Clichy-sous-Bois où deux jeunes adolescents sont morts électrocutés le 27 octobre JULES MOTTE/WOMPA Press

The EDF transformer that electrocuted the
two teenagers on October 27.
Le Monde, November 9.

October 28

- 400 youths clash with police in Clichy-sous-Bois, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. 23 officers are hurt and their colleagues fire rubber bullets to push back mobs. 13 people are arrested and 29 vehicles are burned.

Clichy-sous-Bois



October 29

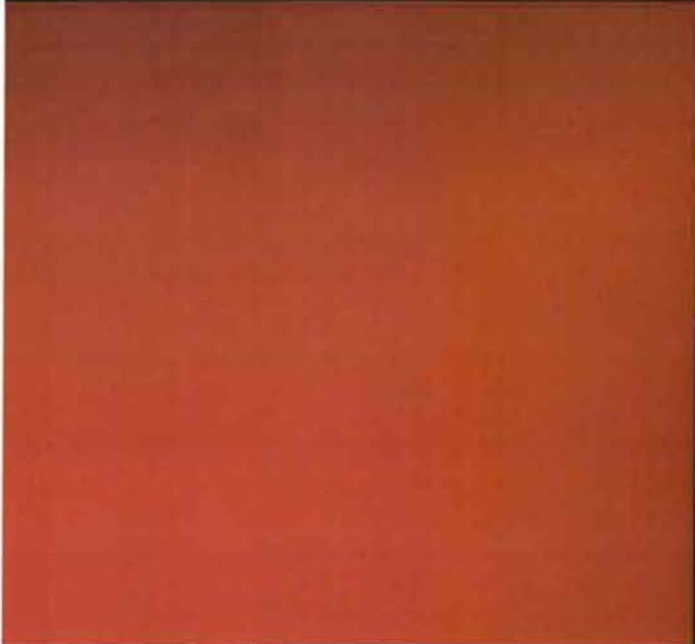
- 500 people march in silence through Clichy-sous-Bois in memory of the dead teenagers.
- Violence resumes at night. 20 vehicles are burned. 9 people are detained.

"Mort Pour Rien"





Riot in Aulnay-sous-Bois



October 30

- Clashes occur on the outskirts of Clichy-sous-Bois. 6 police officers are hurt, 11 people are arrested and eight vehicles are torched. A police teargas grenade hits a mosque, prompting anger among the suburb's large Muslim community.
- Sarkozy declares "zero tolerance" policy.



October 31

- Clashes between youths and police take place in Clichy-sous-Bois and in surrounding suburbs. 19 people are arrested and 68 vehicles are torched.



November 1

- Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin meets the families of the dead teenagers.
- Riots and clashes erupt in suburbs to the north and west of Paris.
Altogether, 180 vehicles are torched and 34 people arrested.



Le Blanc-Mesnil.



Aulnay-sous-Bois , Fifteen cars were torched and police in riot gear fired tear gas and rubber bullets at gangs of angry youths who threw stones at a firehouse and lobbed Molotov cocktails at a town hall annex, according to reports.

Sevran



Bondy



Clichy-sous-Bois



November 2

- President Jacques Chirac tells ministers: “Tempers must calm down.”
- De Villepin and Sarkozy cancel overseas trips to deal with the spreading violence.
- The unrest has sparked a war of words between Villepin and his deputy Nicolas Sarkozy ahead of 2007 presidential elections.
- Trouble erupts in 22 suburban towns north, south, east and west of Paris. A handicapped woman suffers severe burns when youths set a bus on fire. Police say 315 vehicles are torched and at least 15 people arrested.



Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois

- "I speak with real words," Sarkozy told Wednesday's Le Parisien newspaper. "When you fire real bullets at police, you're not a 'youth,' you're a thug."



Le Blanc-Mesnil

November 3

- A criminal investigation is opened into the deaths of the two teenagers.
- The riots spread to other areas around France, in Dijon, Marseille, and in Normandy. Seven cars are set on fire in central Paris. In all, 517 vehicles are torched in and around the capital and another 78 people are arrested.



Aulnay-sous-Bois

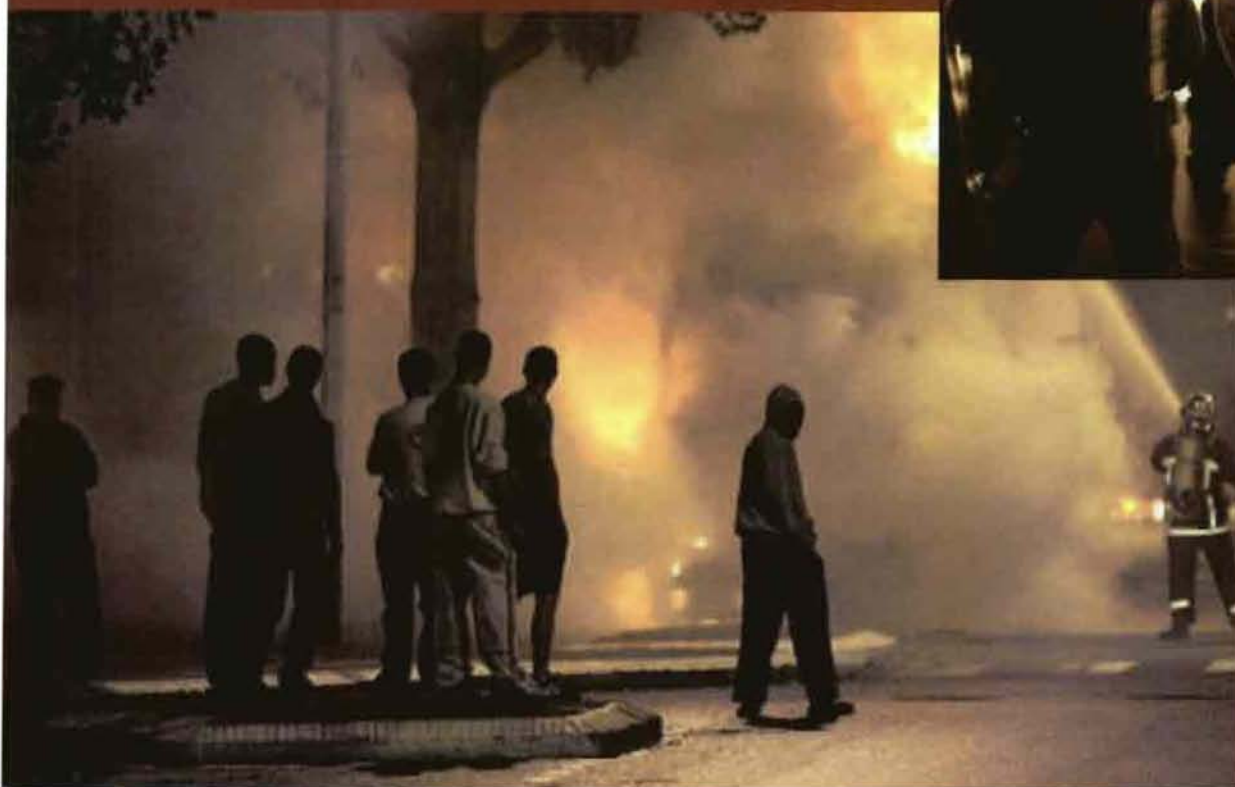


Le Blanc Mesnil.





Aulnay-sous-Bois





Le Blanc-Mesnil

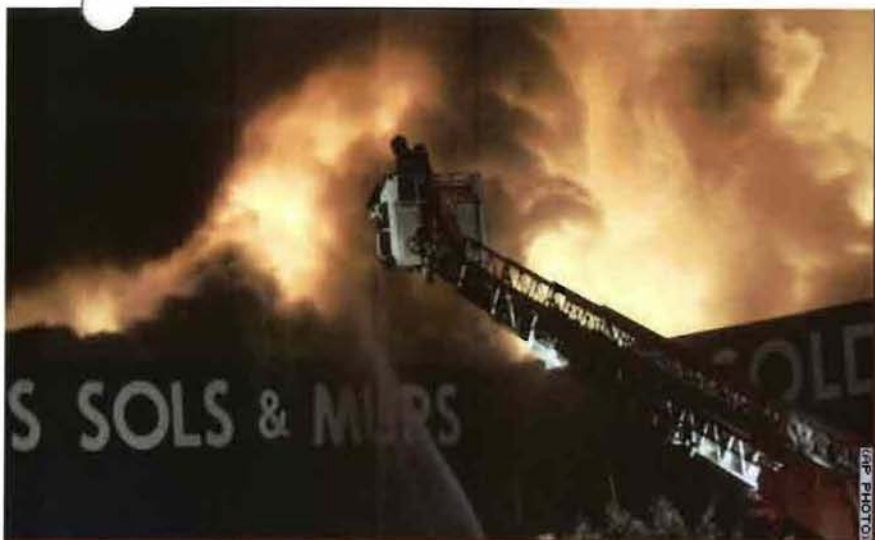


November 4

- Arson hit-and-run attacks take place in suburbs around Paris and other French cities. A total of 897 vehicles are torched and more than 250 people arrested.

Le Bourget





Aubervilliers, north of Paris



Le Bourget



Aulnay-sous-Bois

Trappes, west of Paris



November 5

- Paris Prosecutor General Yves Bot says, “We can see organized actions, a strategy” in the violence.
- The rampages take place in suburbs outside Paris and other cities. At least 70 people are arrested and more than 600 vehicles burned. Police use seven helicopters with lights and cameras to chase fast-moving youths who set fire to property then flee.



Les Mureaux, northwest of Paris.



Aubervilliers
north of Paris

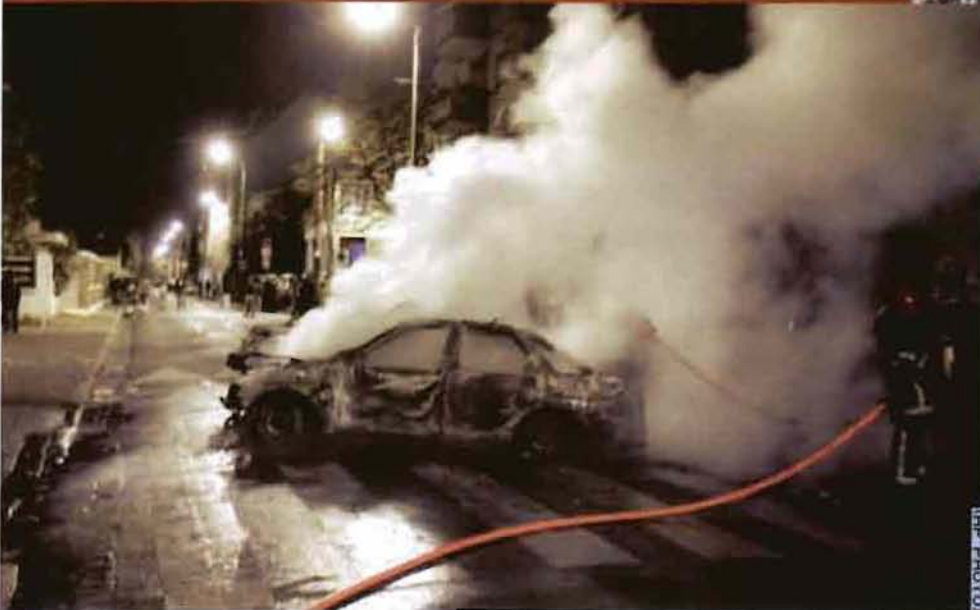




Pierrefitte, north of Paris



Saint Denis,
north of Paris



Les Mureaux, northwest of Paris



Aulnay-sous-Bois



Acheres, west of Paris



A gymnasium in
Noisy-le Grand, east
of Paris.



November 6

- Rioters fire birdshot at police, wounding 10 officers.
- Most violent night yet, as more than 900 cars are torched.
- Chirac promises to arrest and punish those who “sow violence or fear”.
- Churches are targeted by rioters.





Housing complex



Shopping mall



Video Store

Pharmacy



Mayor Jean-Louis Debre outside a destroyed hair salon



Corbeil-Essonnes, south of Paris.

ATM near the broken
window of a post office in
Evreux

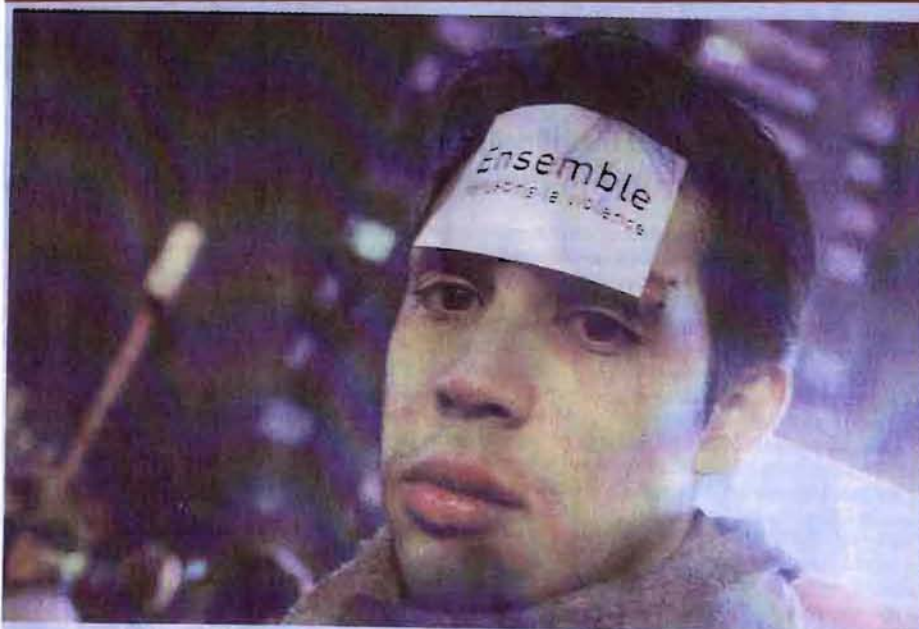


November 7

- De Villepin announces that France will impose curfews under a state of emergency law and call up police reservists to stop the rioting.
- Unrest spreads from Paris's suburbs to nearly 300 cities and towns.



Cenon



Rassemblement, lundi 7 novembre, à Stains (Seine-Saint-Denis), en hommage à Jean-Jacques Le Chenadec, mort, dans la matinée, des suites de blessures infligées par des jeunes gens. RÉGIS DU VIGNAU/REUTERS

Corbeil-Essonnes





Toulouse





As police officers guard the National Assembly in Paris, de Villepin speaks to the Parliament about France's state-of-emergency law and extraordinary measures authorized by the French government.

November 8

- Rioters shrug off emergency laws as they continue looting. A newspaper office is torched and France's second-largest subway system hit by a firebomb.
- Chirac's security measures take effect on Wednesday and are valid for a 12-day state of emergency.



Firefighters in Paris's southern suburb of Gentilly extinguish a torched car -- one of 1,173 cars burned overnight in 226 towns nationwide.



The French Cabinet holds a special session, with Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, right, and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy present.



Grigny



Le Dauphin,
November 9

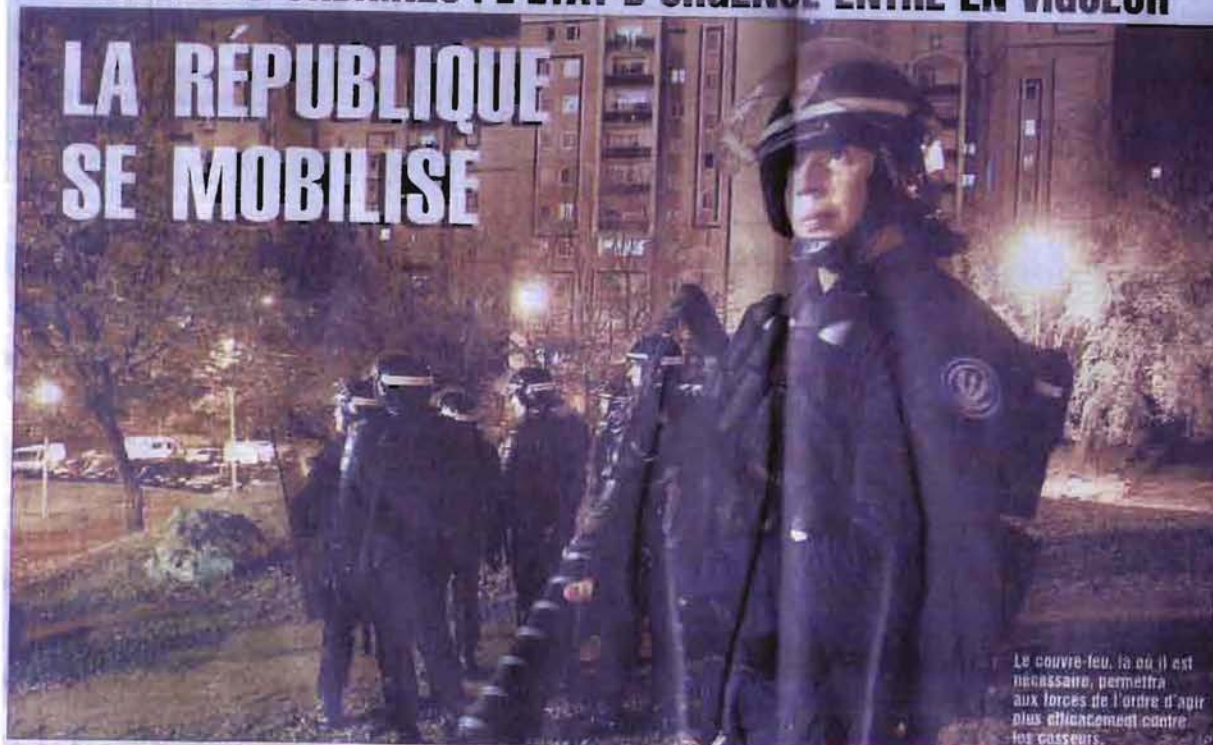


November 9

- Authorities say that, although there was still trouble, there is "a very significant drop" in its intensity. Curfews come into force in 32 French towns and cities, under the emergency powers approved by the cabinet.
- Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy says that non-French nationals convicted over the riots will be deported, drawing a furious reaction from rights groups. The interior ministry later says minors and other categories would be exempt.

VIOLENCES URBAINES : L'ÉTAT D'URGENCE ENTRE EN VIGUEUR

LA RÉPUBLIQUE SE MOBILISE



Le couvre-feu, là où il est nécessaire, permettra aux forces de l'ordre d'agir plus efficacement contre les casseurs.

Le Dauphin, November 9

Douze nuits de violences urbaines

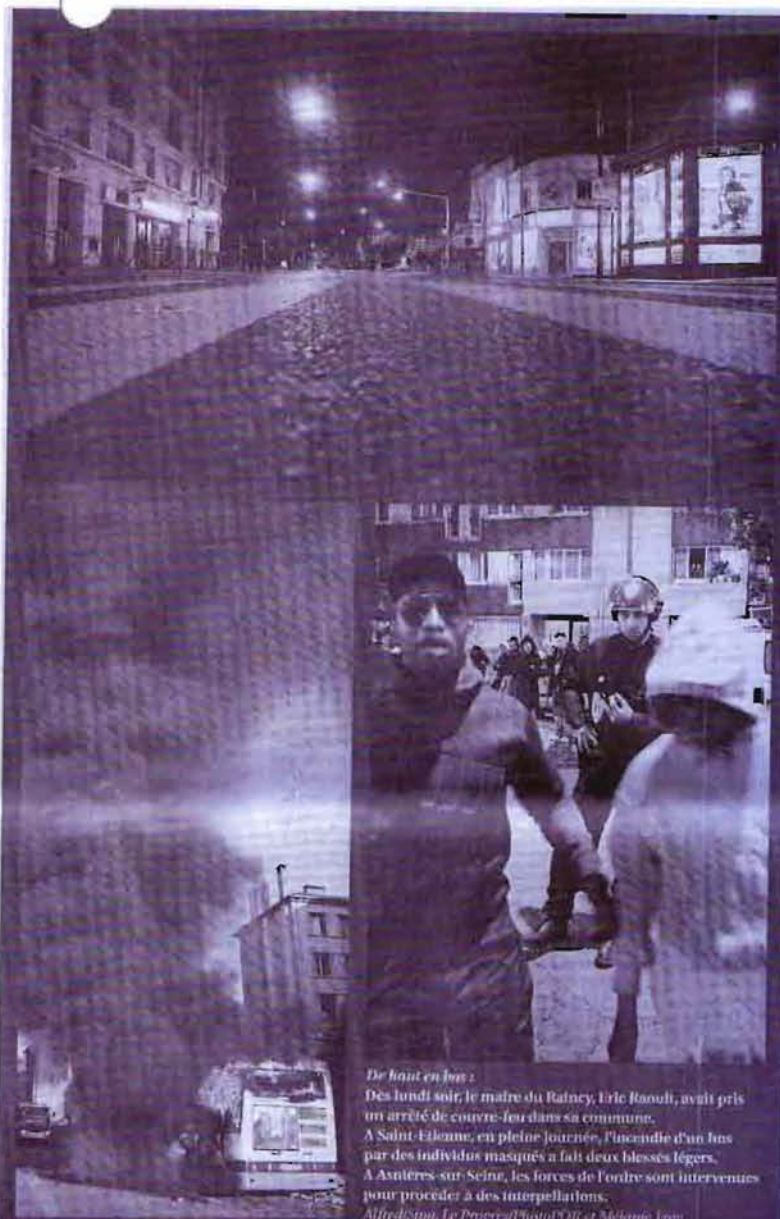


La nuit de lundi fut longue pour les pompiers de l'agglomération lyonnaise.



L'instauration du couvre-feu a donné lieu à des échanges musclés, hier à l'Assemblée nationale. Photo AFP

"12 Nights of Urban Violence"



De haut en bas :

Dés lundi soir, le maire du Raincy, Eric Raoult, avait pris un arrêté de couvre-feu dans sa commune.
A Saint-Etienne, en pleine journée, l'incendie d'un bus par des individus masqués a fait deux blessés légers.
A Asnières-sur-Seine, les forces de l'ordre sont intervenues pour procéder à des interpellations.

Alfred Sipa, Le Progrès, Photo JF et Mélanie Frey



A Toulouse, le quartier du Mirail partagé entre intifada et agora



Le Figaro, November 9

► Le chômage des jeunes (18-24 ans)
et la part des RMistes dans la population



Taux de chômage des jeunes
(en %, au 2e trimestre 2005)

France entière : 25,5%

Part des RMistes par département (en 2004)

Moins de 1% De 1% à 2% Plus de 3%

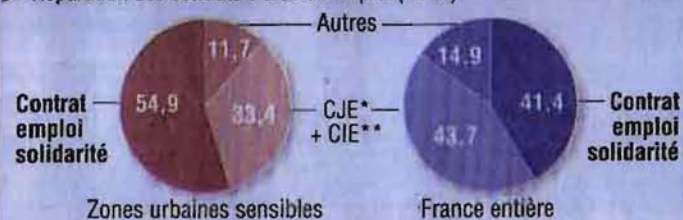
France métropolitaine : 1,76%

Sources : CAF, Insee

► Taux de chômage en 2004 (en %)



► Répartition des contrats d'aide à l'emploi (en %)



* Contrat jeune en entreprise ** Contrat initiative emploi

► Les zones franches urbaines



Le chômage frappe presque deux fois plus les habitants des zones urbaines sensibles, touchant plus d'un jeune sur trois.

Unemployment hits almost 2 times as many citizens from "at risk" zones, affecting more than one out of 3 youths.

November 11

- Remembrance Day ceremonies in central Paris draw a large police presence, but no trouble is reported. Authorities in the capital use their new powers to ban public meetings, citing internet calls for youths to protest.



November 12

- Paris is quiet, but in Lyon police use tear gas to disperse stone-throwing youths, in the first clash in the heart of a major city. The interior ministry says expulsions of convicted foreigners could start on Monday.



Toulouse

November 13

- Authorities in Lyon impose a ban on public meetings during the day. Police are confident things are returning to normal. Far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen says the riots are the result of massive immigration from the Third World.

November 14

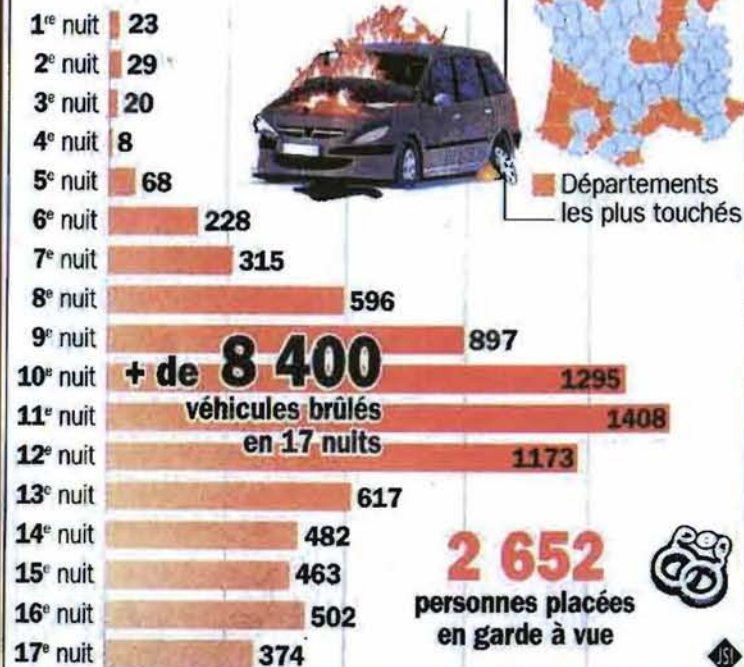


- The French Cabinet approves a bill to extend the country's state of emergency for three months.
- Addressing the nation on Monday for the first time since the unrest erupted nearly three weeks ago, Chirac said he had asked parliament to extend a state of emergency declared on 9 November beyond 12 days to three months.
- Chirac also announced the creation of national volunteer corps to provide job training for 50,000 youths by 2007.



The graph shows the decrease in the number of cars that were burned.

Les voitures incendiées depuis le 27 octobre



Depuis le début des violences urbaines, plus de 8 400 véhicules ont été incendiés avec un pic dans la soirée du dimanche 6 au lundi 7 novembre au cours de laquelle 1 408 voitures ont brûlé.



Aujourd'hui, November 14

La Dépêche,
November 14



Les pompiers ont déployé de gros moyens mais le feu a ravagé les 1400 m² du magasin de Bagnac samedi soir. DDM, X. De Benoit



Les Echos

Mardi 15 novembre 2005



Rassemblement de pompiers. Entre 350 et 450 pompiers du Var, des Bouches-du-Rhône et des Alpes-Maritimes ont organisé hier matin un sit-in devant la mairie de Saint-Raphaël pour réclamer un nouveau régime d'indemnités. Le rassemblement s'est déroulé dans le calme mais un commissaire de police a été légèrement blessé par une fusée de détresse tirée horizontalement.

Les Echos,
November 15



November 15

- The bill extending emergency powers is approved by the lower house. It is adopted the next day, Wednesday November 16, by the Senate; Sarkozy warns that "nothing has yet been won for good."
- Opinion polls show improved ratings for Sarkozy, Villepin and Chirac.

November 17

- The national police service says the situation has returned to normal. The violence has left more than 9,000 vehicles torched, damaged scores of official buildings and led to the arrest of nearly 3,000 people.

November 29

- De Villepin avowed that weeks of violence by thousands of young people in France were not riots but protests by youths who had lost their identities.



Conclusion

Ultimately, the French riots of the fall of 2005 represent the culmination of much discontent that many Americans cannot understand. This was a problem of racism unlike any other that we know. It was an issue of a whole sector of society rebelling. The rapid spread of the violence showed that it was about more than the death of the two teenagers. Unemployment in many of these communities runs at 30 to 40 percent, even higher among young people. The banlieues are monuments to France's failure to integrate large parts of its Muslim population, despite many of them being from families that have lived in France for two or three generations.

How have these riots changed American opinions of France? The negative publicity has distorted an already biased nation to believe that France is deserving of this sort of travesty. Fox News quotes, "It's hard to feel sorry for the French. After all, they certainly don't waste any compassion on Americans." The explosive coverage of these events by the American media show just to what extent the relationship between these countries has deteriorated.

Overall, the riots paralyzed an entire nation, and the whole world watched while it was happening. Certainly, the strain on the French economy will become evident, and the government must work efficiently to incorporate these citizens while being sensitive to their needs.

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All photos and information of the daily events that transpired came from these sources:

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