A SHORT HISTORY OF ALGERIA

Since the 5th century BC, THE INDIGENOUS TRIBES OF Northern Africa, identified by the Romans as Berbers, have been pushed back from the coast by successive waves of Phoenician, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Arab, Ottoman and, finally, French invaders. The greatest cultural impact came from the Arab invasions of the 11th and 18th centuries AD which brought Islam and the Arabic language. The effects of the most recent French occupation - such as the use of the French language - are still pervasive.

FRENCH COLONIZATION

North African boundaries have shifted during various stages of the conquests. The borders of modern Algeria were created by the French, whose colonization began in 1830. To benefit French colonists, most of whom were farmers and businessmen, northern Algeria was eventually organized into overseas provinces of France with representatives in the French National Assembly. France controlled the entire country, but the traditional Muslim population in the rural areas remained separated from the modern infrastructure of the European community.

THE REVOLUTION

Algerians began their revolt on November 1, 1954. The revolution, launched by a small group of nationalists who called themselves the National Liberation Front (FLN), was a guerrilla war. More moderate, pre-Revolutionary goals included full citizenship with equal rights. As France resisted, Algerians opted increasingly for full independence. After an exceptionally bloody revolutionary war in which perhaps a million Algerians died, protracted negotiations led to a cease-fire signed by France. The Evian Accords also provided for continuing economic, financial, technical, and cultural relations along with administrative arrangement until a referendum on self-determination could be held.

INDEPENDENCE

The referendum was held in Algeria on July 1, 1962, and France declared Algeria independent on July 3. Approximately one million Europeans fled Algeria at independence.

PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

On September 8, 1963, a constitution was adopted by referendum, and later that month, Ahmed Ben Bella was formally elected president. On June 19, 1965, President Ben Bella was replaced in a bloodless coup by a Council of the Revolution headed by Defense Minister Colonel Houari Boumediene. Houari Boumediene was elected President of the Republic (which was a one-party state) on December 10, 1976. He died two years later. On Boumediene's death in 1978, Col. Chadli
Bendjedid assumed the presidency until forced to resign in 1992. A military junta ruled until 1994, when retired General Liamine Zeroual was appointed president. He subsequently was elected President in November 1995.

The National Assembly was dissolved and the constitution suspended following the overthrow of the Ben Bella government. Eleven years of rule by decree followed. A new constitution was finally approved by popular referendum on November 19, 1976. The constitution was further amended via referendum in 1989 and 1996.

The military-dominated regime annulled parliamentary elections in January 1992 to forestall a victory by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). There ensued a campaign of violence by radical Islamist Salvation Front (FIS). There ensued a campaign of violence by radical Islamist elements that continued today. In June 1997, there were multi-party elections for the Parliament, Lower Chamber, and the National Popular Assembly.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CITY OF ALGIERS

Algiers is the capital and largest city in Algeria with a population of three million. It is also the nation's commercial and financial center.

The Algiers site was first settled by Phoenician merchants who founded a number of colonies on the North Africa, fell under the rule of Carthage, another Phoenician colony which is currently part of Tunisia. In 146 BC, the Romans gained control of the Algiers site along with the entire North African coast. Algiers remained a Roman colony until it was destroyed by a wave of Vandals in 430 AD They were followed by Byzantines about 200 years later.

THE BARBAROSSAS

In 935 AD, Algiers itself was founded and named El Djazair by the chief of a Muslim tribe called the Sanhaja. El Djazair was also coveted by the Portuguese and Spaniards, however, and the notorious Barbarossa brothers were called to defend the town. Some sources describe the Barbarossas as Green pirates converted to Islam, while other sources describe them as Turkish Corsairs. Under Turkish protection, one of these brothers, Khair Ed-Din, became ruler of the city in 1518 and in 1541 repulsed the Spanish, who were led personally by the EMPEROR Charges V. Khair Ed-Din Barbarossa then made Algiers the stronghold of the Barbary pirates who continued to govern the city under Ottoman Turk hegemony for about 300 years - despite bombardments by Danes, Spaniards, and French. In fact, Barbary pirates were such a major feature of Mediterranean shipping that in 1797 the young U.S. Government concluded a treaty with the dey of Algiers, guaranteeing payment of tribute amounting to $10 million.

FRENCH CONQUEST AND CULTURE
On July 4, 1830, a French army led by Louis Auguste Victor de Bourmont, Count of Ghaisnes took Algiers. This became a base for French occupation of all Algeria. The French brought to Algiers a European culture which eventually blended with the city's Muslim culture.

In World War II, Algiers was occupied by Anglo-American forces. From November 1942, it served as headquarters of Allied forces in North Africa under General Charles de Gaulle as provisional capital of France. General Eisenhower had his headquarters here during the North African Campaign. In 1954, Algeria revolted against the French. Algiers became the national capital in 1962 when Algeria gained independence from France. Since that time, Algiers has grown rapidly.

URBAN GROWTH

Although the city was built to house 700,000, its current population is between 4-5 million, causing many problems including severe overcrowding, pollution, and a serious housing shortage.

THE CASBAH

The oldest section of the city, the casbah (meaning fortress in Arabic), is now a slum-like area of dense population. In the maze of staircases, passages, and crooked lanes, there are many old buildings with the characteristic overhanging upper floors supported by wooden beams. With its many existing physical structures, the Casbah continues to bear testimony to its critical role during the period of Turkish rule and during its war for independence from the French.