The Revocation of the Edit of Nantes had profound implications for English foreign and domestic policy. Occurring as it did in 1685, the Revocation and the resultant wave of French Protestant immigrants contributed not a little to the context of the Glorious Revolution—and the resulting tension between international Protestant loyalties and the growing nationalism of the British. The Revolution of 1688 secured a Protestant settlement for the throne, and starting with King William's wars, began over a century of off-and-on fighting against the ‘popish tyranny’ of France. These were not primarily wars of religion, but scholars from Linda Colley to John Brewer have shown how heavily they contributed to the modern British nation-state and its identity as a bastion of Protestant liberty.

The Huguenots, as French Calvinists, embodied the very paradox at the heart of this developing British national identity. They were victims of the French Catholic monarchical tyranny, and thus justified both the Glorious Revolution itself and the wars against the French. But they were still French, and, congregating in London, controlled some very lucrative elements of the merchant economy. Additionally, they were not part of the Church of England, and as dissenters, they challenged the limits of the nascent Act of Toleration. To what extent could these French strangers be incorporated into the civil society of the British nation?

The possibilities for a ‘British’ identity, made more urgent by the union of the Scots and English crowns in 1707 and the settlement/pacification of Ireland following the Revolution of 1688, were not unrelated to the larger war against Louis XIV’s universal monarchy. The large Huguenot migration to England, Ireland, and other parts of the British colonial world were part and parcel of these developments. While their integration into the British polity was not without conflict,
Huguenots intentionally promoted the religious and economic affiliations they had with the British and identified themselves with the burgeoning enterprise of the empire. Ultimately they were successful at affiliating themselves with the political and cultural priorities of their host nation, but the manner in which they did this, and the reception they received, is instructive for the student of early British nationalism.

The first concern on the part of Londoners and other English men and women does seem to have been with the nature of the foreignness of this large group of immigrants. To the extent that they remained distinctly ‘French’, to that extent they were a threat. Charles Davenant, whose economic theories encouraged immigration, suggested that they be scattered throughout the entire country, because ‘they may endanger the Government by being suffer’d to remain, such vast Numbers of ‘em, here in London, where they inhabit all together, at least 30000 Persons in two Quarters of the Town, without intermarrying with the English, or learning our language, by which Means for several Years to come, they are in a way still to continue Foriegners, and perhaps may have a Foreign Interest and Foreign Inclinations.’ When they lived in large numbers together, as they did in London and Canterbury, it was disconcerting to the British who traveled through their streets that they often didn’t hear English spoken. Xenophobia also strengthened with respect to William's non-English courtiers and fighting force (which included many Huguenot soldiers), because 'that foreign soldiers are dangerous to Liberty we may produce Examples from all Countries and all Ages.' Historian John Brewer points out that ‘the Huguenot officer was a sufficiently familiar character to be parodied by Henry Fielding in Tom Jones as the soldier who had forgotten his native tongue but had also failed to acquire English.’

The churches and their leadership were quite aware of the challenge posed by this failure to blend in and scolded their parishioners lest their deportment or excessive ‘Frenchness’ alarm the neighbors. The consistory records in 1690 warned against any entertainment or frivolity

---

1 Charles Davenant, *An Essay upon the probable methods of making a people gainers in the ballance of trade* (London: 1699; Wing D309), 28.