

The Sétif and Guelma Massacres (May 8, 1945)

The Sétif and Guelma Massacres were tragic events that marked a turning point in Algeria's struggle for independence. On May 8, 1945, while the world was celebrating the end of World War II, thousands of Algerians took to the streets in the town of Sétif and other nearby cities such as Guelma and Kherrata. They wanted to celebrate peace but also to demand freedom and independence for Algeria, which had been under French colonial rule since 1830.

During the demonstrations, protesters carried Algerian flags and shouted slogans calling for liberty. The French authorities, however, reacted with violence. When clashes broke out, French police opened fire on the crowd in Sétif, killing many protesters. The situation quickly escalated into widespread violence across the region.

In response, the French army and settlers launched a brutal campaign of repression. Villages were bombed, homes were destroyed, and thousands of Algerians — men, women, and children — were killed. Estimates vary, but historians believe that between 20,000 and 45,000 Algerians lost their lives in the massacres.

These tragic events deeply shocked the Algerian population. They revealed the true nature of French colonialism and convinced many that independence could not be achieved through peaceful means. The memory of the Sétif and Guelma massacres became a symbol of injustice and a strong motivation for the future War of Independence, which began nine years later, in 1954.

Activities

A. Vocabulary

Match each word with its correct meaning:

1. Massacre
 2. Demonstration
 3. Repression
 4. Colonial rule
 5. Escalate
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- a) To increase or become more serious.
 - b) A cruel and violent killing of many people.
 - c) Control of one country by another.
 - d) A public protest or march.
 - e) Using force to stop people from expressing themselves freely.

B. Comprehension Questions

1. When did the Sétif and Guelma Massacres take place?
2. What were Algerians celebrating on that day?
3. What did the protesters want?
4. How did the French authorities react to the demonstrations?
5. Approximately how many Algerians were killed during the massacres?
6. Why were these events important for the future of Algeria?

C. True or False

Write T (True) or F (False):

1. The demonstrations in Sétif were violent from the beginning.
2. The French authorities responded peacefully to the protests.
3. Many villages were destroyed by the French army.
4. The massacres made Algerians lose hope in independence.
5. These events inspired the beginning of the War of Independence.

D. Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The Sétif and Guelma massacres occurred after:
 - a) The start of World War I
 - b) The end of World War II
 - c) The Algerian Revolution
2. The protests were organized mainly to demand:
 - a) Food and housing
 - b) Independence and freedom
 - c) Military support
3. The repression caused the deaths of:
 - a) A few hundred people
 - b) Around 5,000 people
 - c) Tens of thousands of people
4. These events helped lead to:
 - a) The Evian Accords
 - b) The Algerian War of Independence
 - c) The Battle of Algiers