

# France's first immigration museum opens

- [Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris
- [The Guardian](#), Wednesday 10 October 2007

After 20 years of rows, controversy and warnings that it was a dangerous taboo, France finally opens its first museum to immigration today.

The new museum explores two centuries of immigration to France, featuring exhibits on French xenophobia and hostility as well as famous immigrants such as the Polish-born scientist Marie Curie.

But just as French politicians are locked in a slanging-match over president Nicolas Sarkozy's new hardline immigration policy, the museum's launch made headlines for being conspicuously low-key.

Mr Sarkozy, who has attended other major Paris museum openings with great pomp and fanfare, will not open the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI). Nor will the immigration minister, Brice Hortefeux, attend. They are said to fear public demonstrations by human rights groups over controversial policies such as DNA testing for immigrants who want to bring their families to France.

In 1931, France had the highest proportion of immigrants of any country. Around 3 million immigrants made up 7% of its population, a higher ratio than in the US.

In 2002, President Jacques Chirac finally gave the museum the go-ahead.

Le Monde yesterday praised the museum and beseeched France to acknowledge the role of immigration in its history. "This museum bears witness that 'French identity' exists, but it has always been mixed," the paper said.

Hélène Lafont-Couturier, the museum's director, told the Guardian she hoped the museum would allow the nation to face "an important part of its history which it has preferred to hide from".