BLACK PARIS

Spring 2017
Columbia University, Paris

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Institut d’Etudes Théâtrales

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

This undergraduate course aims to unveil a lesser known face of Paris linked to its colonial past in order to reread the present social, political and cultural landscape of France’s capital city. By visiting the hotspots of a forgotten Parisian black history, students will learn about the legacy of a colonial past often unknown and neglected. Sites will include the Latin Quarter which saw the birth of Negritude movement in the 1930s with the encounter of African and Caribbean intellectuals (Césaire, Senghor, Damas) and the foundation of the editions Présence Africaine with Alioune Diop; Saint Germain des Prés and Pigalle which celebrated jazz music in cabarets; the Museum of the history of immigration in Porte Dorée and the Musée des Arts Premiers at the Quai Branly. This itinerant historical approach of Paris will be complemented by an exploration of the contemporary cultural and artistic politics of the Black stage. By attending theater plays, dance shows and concerts, and meeting with African and Caribbean artists living in Paris (playwrights, directors, actors, choreographers, dancers, musicians), students will enjoy the opportunity to explore Black Parisian culture from an insider’s point of view and find out what it means to be a Black artist today in France.

The reading and analysis of literary and cinematographic works will allow students to tackle social, political and racial issues, and explore further the global dimension of today's diasporic and multicultural France. By studying films such as Bande de filles or plays like Bintou, we will discuss life in the suburbs (“la banlieue”) and address complex notions of “laïcité” and “integration.” This course will finally question how skin color and politics are deeply intertwined by attending the Commemoration of Slavery (May 10th) initiated by the former Minister of Justice, Christiane Taubira, herself a victim of racism, and by examining the recent election of Dany Laferrière, Haitian writer, to the Académie Française. Does the cultural, intellectual and artistic capital that Paris was in the 1930s remain a cosmopolitan city open to the world?
STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

WEEK 1
- Introduction: historical overview of French colonization and decolonization (Africa and the Caribbean)
- What does the word “Black” mean in French?

WEEK 2: Black Interwar Paris: a cultural and intellectual capital
To be a Black student in Paris: Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, the fathers of Négritude
Excerpts from Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal, Damas’ Black Label
Jazz music and clubs in Saint Germain des Prés

Negritude disciples: Edouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon and the experience of exile in Paris
Excerpts from Soleil de la conscience by Glissant and Peau noire masques blancs by Fanon

WEEK 3: American Black Paris: another homeland for American artists?
Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre: “J’ai deux amours, mon pays et Paris”

Harlem Renaissance poets

WEEK 4: Guided visit of “Black Paris” with Kevi (Sciences Po)
http://www.blackpariswalks.com/about/
From the Place du Panthéon to Château Rouge passing through the Quarter Latin
Saint Germain des Prés, Pigalle, and la Goutte d’or
Duration: 3h30

In-class report and discussion

WEEK 5: Migrations in the 1960s: a modern slave trade?
Migration from the French Antilles to the French metropole organized by the BUMIDOM (Bureau d’Immigration des DOM)
Play (excerpts): Les négriers by Daniel Boukman
Documentary: L’avenir est ailleurs by Antoine Léonard-Maestrati

WEEK 6: Black theater in Paris in the 1970s
Caribbean and African theater companies: la Compagnie des Griots and Le Théâtre Noir by Benjamin Jules Rosette
Invited artists: Mariann Mathéus, Guadeloupean singer and actress who worked with Toto Bissainthe from Haiti

WEEK 7: African art: Museum of the Quai Branly (Musée des Arts Premiers)
Guided tour
In-class report and discussion
WEEK 8: Diasporic artists in exile?
- Le Théâtre de l’Air Nouveau founded by Luc Saint Eloy (invited artist): to live and create in Paris, a fight?
Author of Trottoir chagrin (play on exile, and prostitution) and a documentary on discrimination in France

- Between Paris and New York: Maryse Condé’s choice
Documentary: Une voix singulière (Françoise Vergès and Jerôme Sesquin)
Invitation of the author to meet with the students

WEEK 9: Contemporary Black Stages
Gaël Octavia, representative of the young Caribbean female playwright
Excerpts of the following plays: Le voyage, Congre et homard, Une vie familiale

Invitation of the author to class

WEEK 10: Let’s go to the theater!
Choice of a play staged in one of the Parisian theaters specializing in Francophone drama: TARMAC (scène francophone) or another theatre depending on the programs of the season

In-class discussion and analysis

WEEK 11: Paris suburbs on screen and on stage
Play: Bintou by Koffi Kwahulé, a playwright from the Ivory Coast living in Paris
Invitation of the author

Film: L’esquive by Abdelatif Kechiche or Bande de filles by Céline Sciamma

WEEK 12: Black Music and Dance in Paris
Max Diakok and the Company Boukousou: gwoka (traditional drum music) and contemporary dance
Performance and meeting with the artist

WEEK 13: What does it mean to a Black actor/actress today in Paris?
Who and where are the Black actors today on Parisian stages?
Open discussion with invited actors from the Caribbean and Africa (Karine Pédurant, Henri Nlende, Eva Doumbia): difficulties, challenges, discrimination, exclusion?

Gerty Dambury, co-founder « Décolonisons les arts »

Invitation of Sylvie Chalaye, Professor at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, specialist in Francophone African theater and Black representation on stage, author of Cultures noires: la scène et les images (2013).
WEEK 14: Who are the Black academicians?
The history and role played by the Académie Française
Black academicians from yesterday and today: Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal),
Assia Djébar (Algérie), Dany Laferrière (Haïti)

WEEK 15: Commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery
Christiane Taubira, former minister of Justice, author of L’esclavage expliqué à ma fille who passed the bill of recognition of slavery as crime against humanity

Possible participation in the events of May 10th (commemoration of the abolition of slavery)

EVALUATION OF THE COURSE

Preparation and participation
This course is based on an active participation in and outside class, including mandatory attendance at all artistic and cultural events organized in museums, theaters, cinemas. Students are expected to read texts and articles as well as prepare questions related to the topics of the day before coming to class. This will ensure readiness to take part in class discussions, where one’s interpretations and observations will be confronted with those of other students.

Written report on a play, film or dance performance
Students will choose one among the cultural events that are planned, and write a 3-5pp analysis presenting the artist, the performance, its aesthetic features while offering personal interpretations as if one were a critic.

Oral presentation
Students will choose an author studied in class and give an “exposé” on his/her life and work (10-15 minutes followed by a discussion)
Possibility to use powerpoint and/or any video or audio documents.

Final paper
Students will write a paper (6-8pp) on a topic they choose and which is related to works studied in class and artists they have met.

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