

“Paris Noire: Black American women in the City of Lights”

AS.100.218

Tuesdays 1:30pm-4pm

Latrobe 107

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11am-12pm or by appointment.

Course description

This class seeks to explore the construction and articulation of Black womanhood (queer and trans inclusive) in the anglophone and francophone worlds in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Through a combination of secondary and primary source analysis, we will follow African American women across the Atlantic and analyze their experiences with Frenchness, the French language, French art and culture, and French geographies. We will also learn about French Black women and explore how they created institutions, networks and solidarities with Black Women in the anglophone world and navigated the demands and offerings of French republicanism. What did African American women find in the francophone world? How did they navigate the real and imagined places of Frenchness? How does the study of blackness in France allow us to think differently about the challenges of white supremacy in the U.S.?

This class explores blackness and gender as social constructs, markings imposed on the body by historical forces, from the first colonial encounters to the Present, but also as political and cultural identities. We will also interrogate the ways that class, gender, sexuality, national identity, culture and language shaped and mediated Black experiences through time.

Learning Goals

In this class we will explore the following questions: How do we address absence or silences in our sources and work against the erasure of Black women from French and American archives? How can we read “against the grain”? How do we tell a transnational history of race and gender? How do historical subjects create spaces, both real and imagined? We will use digital tools and explore the possibilities of a map-making project by following one or several Black American women in Paris and France from Sally Hemings to Angela Davis and attempt to recreate what their lived geographies looked like. By the end of this class, students should be able to:

1. describe and analyze the main arguments of primary source documents
2. contextualize those arguments in relation to broader historical trends
3. synthesize evidence from multiple sources to make interpretive claims -- both in writing and using digital tools
4. use textual, material and visual archival material to pose and answer historical research questions.

Required Texts

All reading materials will either be available through the library's eReserves, online via catalyst, or in pdf format uploaded to canvas. The primary source materials will be made available under "files" on canvas.

Assignments/Grading

- Participation = 30% of final grade
 - Weekly discussion posts on canvas = 30% of final grade
 - Final Project (**Due date 5/9/23**) and presentation (**4/25/23**) = 40% of final grade
- Students will be expected to do the class readings and participate in-class in ways that demonstrate that they are critically engaging with the readings (30% of final grade). I realize that not everyone is comfortable with the prospect of speaking in public. The quality of interventions is of more importance to me than the quantity, and I will always do my best to foster a welcoming discussion space and accommodate students' needs. Here are things I will expect from student interventions:
- a. Critical analysis of the texts we read, rather than mere repetition of facts or ideas from them.
 - b. Use of evidence from the texts to support their claims
 - c. Responses to classmates' comments (again, using evidence)
 - d. Rephrasing of a text's arguments or main ideas into their own words
 - e. Making comparisons between different texts we have read or making connections to ideas, events, figures we have studied in previous readings
- Students will be asked to write short weekly discussion posts on canvas engaging with the secondary reading materials (30% of final grade). These posts should be 100-150 words and will be due by 7pm the day before class. The same guidelines apply for the contents of class participation and canvas posts. I will provide leading questions and specific prompts to help students craft their response. Note: "Recommended readings" are suggestions for students with an interest in pursuing history as a major, or in graduate school, or to help students build a bibliography for their research project.
- Final project (a) and Presentation (b): 40% of final grade.
- a) Students will be asked to choose one woman from a list of potential historical actors provided by me or introduced in our secondary readings. Students should aim to decide on their choice of historical subject by week 5. We will work together to curate a set of primary documents pertaining to the woman that students are focusing on. If possible, we will travel to archives together and look through physical documents; if not, I will make sure that digital archives are available. Overall, the research should be in conversation with the broader historical questions we will explore throughout the semester and offer a short biographical account of the woman that students have chosen to study. We will have weekly check-ins from week 5 onward to discuss

research. From week 10 onward students will be expected to begin working on their final presentations and digital projects to summarize their findings. Fun fact: most people don't read the full syllabus. If you've read this far, email me a picture of a cute animal and I will give you extra credit on your participation grade. Students are encouraged to be creative! Projects can be in any digital format they choose, be it a powerpoint slideshow, a website/blog, an interactive map, an online museum exhibit, a podcast, a video etc. Technical help will be provided if need be. Final Projects are **due May 9th 2023**.

- b) Our final meeting, **April 25th, 2023**, will be dedicated to 15 minute presentations, reflecting on the challenges students have encountered, the most rewarding aspects of their research, and a summary of findings.

Academic Integrity

In this course, students must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics:

<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates>

Attendance

This course is based on the discussion of rich texts and the exchange of ideas; it is therefore important to be present for each session, prepared and ready to engage. However, I am aware that many things in life get in the way, especially in COVID times. If students cannot attend for any reason, I would appreciate them letting me know ahead of time whenever possible. If students have to miss class they are still encouraged to write a post on canvas. Please note that although there is no rubric for attendance, if students miss over half of our discussions it will be very difficult to get the maximum amount of points for participation.

Disabilities/Accommodations

If a student has a registered accommodation for a disability, please let me know. If a student believes they might require accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services (studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu, 410-516-4720) or visit their office at 101 Shaffer Hall.

Mental Health

We in the History Department and the University as a whole are aware that many students experience anxiety, depression, and other emotional challenges during the course of the semester. If students are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or any other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If students are concerned about a friend or a peer, please also encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>

Inclusive Teaching/Classroom Climate

I am committed to creating a classroom environment that values the diversity of experiences and perspectives that all students bring. Everyone here has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. I believe fostering an inclusive climate is important. Please join me in creating a welcoming and vibrant classroom climate. Note that students should expect to be challenged

intellectually by me and their peers, and at times this may feel uncomfortable. Indeed, it can be helpful to be pushed sometimes in order to learn and grow. But at no time in this learning process should someone be singled out or treated unequally on the basis of any seen or unseen part of their identity. If students ever have concerns in this course about harassment, discrimination, or any unequal treatment, or if they seek accommodations or resources, I invite them to share directly with me. I promise that I will take that communication seriously and to seek mutually acceptable resolutions and accommodations. Reporting will never impact a student's course grade. Students may also share concerns with the History department chair (Tobie Meyer-Fong, tmeyerf@jhu.edu), the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Sarah Pearsall, spearsal@jhu.edu), the Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion (Darlene Saporu, dsaporu@jhu.edu), or the Office of Institutional Equity (oi@jhu.edu). In handling reports, people will protect student privacy as much as possible, but faculty and staff are required to officially report information for some cases (e.g. sexual harassment).

Communication

Email is the best way to contact me (mpilatt1@jhu.edu). I check emails from roughly 8am to 7pm, from Monday to Friday and on the mornings on Saturdays, as that is the work schedule that works best for me. Please do not expect an immediate response for any emails sent outside of my work hours or on Sundays, unless regarding time sensitive issues. Students should also feel free to stop by office hours where I will do my best to address any questions or concerns they might have; if office hours are not convenient, please reach out to make an appointment.

If students would like to reach out to me about personal matters, I will always protect their privacy as much as possible but please note that I am required to officially report information relating to sexual harassment.

Course Schedule

Week 1 -- 1/24/2023 -- “There are no slaves in France”: Absence and silence

- Preface, Chapter One, & Chapter Five from Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, power and the production of history*, Boston, Mass. : Beacon Press, 1995.
- Introduction and Epilogue from Peabody, Sue, ‘*There Are No Slaves in France*’: *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Recommended Reading:

- Brooks Higginbotham, Evelyn, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter, 1992), pp. 251-274.
- Gilroy, Paul, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Routledge, London, 2013.

Week 2 -- 1/31/2023 -- Black Americans in Paris: 18th and 19th century

- Chapter Three “After Emancipation The Talented Tenth in Paris” from Fabre, Michel, *From Harlem to Paris, Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1991.
- Jones, Suzanne W. "Imagining Jefferson and Hemings in Paris." *Transatlantica: Revue D'Etudes Américaines* 1 (2011): 1-10.
- Gordon-Reed, Annette, “Sally Hemings in Paris”
<https://www.theroot.com/sally-hemings-in-paris-1790900184>

Recommended Reading:

- Gordon-Reed, Annette, *The Hemingses of Monticello : an American family*, New York : W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.

Week 3 -- 2/7/2023 -- Creating the Black “Other” I -- Black Women’s Bodies

- Introduction, Chapter One & Chapter Four from Mitchell, Robin, *Venus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth Century France*, University of Georgia Press, 2020.
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis.

Recommended Reading:

- Morgan, Jennifer, "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770. *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), 167-192

Week 4 -- 2/14/2023 -- The Black Model

- Prologue & Chapter 1 from Denise Murrell, *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*, Yale University Press, 2018.

- The Black model - exhibit at the Musee d'Orsay
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SewdyvAFmbI&ab_channel=ArtStudentsLeagueNY
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis.

Recommended Reading:

- Jones, Martha S., *All bound up together, the Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*, UNC Press, 2009.

Week 5 -- 2/21/2023 -- Creating the Black "Other" II -- Civilization and Modernity

- **Deadline to select a topic for research project**
- Chapter 4 in Stovall, Tyler, *Transnational France, The Modern History of a Universal Nation*, Avalon Publishing, 2015.
- Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 -- Terrell, Mary Church, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, District of Columbia: Ransdell Inc. Printers and Publishers, 1940.
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis. Paris Exposition Universelle. Wilks, Jennifer M. "The French and Swiss Diaries of Mary Church Terrell, 1888–89: Introduction and Annotated Translation." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, vol. 3 no. 1, 2014, p. 8-32.

Recommended Reading:

- T. Tsenes-Hills, *I am the Utterance of My Name: Black Victorian Feminist Discourse and Intellectual Enterprise at the Columbian Exposition, 1893* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2006).

Week 6 -- 2/28/2023 -- From the Margins: thinking about space

- bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 1989, No. 36 (1989), pp. 15-23
- May, V. M., *Thinking from the margins, acting at the intersections: Anna Julia Cooper's Voice from the South*. *Hypatia*, 19 (2), 74– 91.(2004).
- Virtual tours TBD
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis. "Visualizing Black Paris" Photos from 1889 Paris BNF <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447017m>

Recommended Reading:

- McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minnesota University Press, 2006.
- McDowell Linda, *Gender, identity and place: understanding feminist geographies* Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 1999.

Week 7 -- 3/7/2023 -- Education

- Day Moore, Celeste, "Every Wide-Awake Negro Teacher of French Should Know' The Pedagogies of Black Internationalism in the Early Twentieth Century", in *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, edited by Keisha N. Blain,

Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2018. (15 pages)

- Stephanie Y. Evans, "African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad", University of Florida, in *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* (24 pages)
- Introduction & Chapter One in Lindsey, Treva B. *Colored No More, Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* U. of Illinois Press, 2017. (49 pages)
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis. Anna Julia Cooper's *The Third Step*, Anna J. Cooper papers online at Howard University

Recommended Reading:

- Roland Bauman, *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College*. Ohio University Press, 2010.

Week 8 -- 3/14/2023 -- Diaspora Feminism I

- Rief, Michelle, "Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The international agenda of African American Clubwomen 1880-1940" *The Journal of African American History*; Summer 2004; 203-222. (19 pages)
- Vezzosi, Elisabetta, "The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights" 2014. (21 pages)
- Materson, Lisa G., "African American Women's Global Journeys and the Construction of Cross-Ethnic Racial Identity," *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, 2009, pp. 35-42 (7 pages)
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis.

Spring break March 18th -26th

Week 9 -- 3/28/2023 -- Diaspora Feminism II

- Chapter 3 from Edwards, Brent Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003. (68 pages)
- Introduction from Braddock, Jeremy and Eburne, Jonathan P. . *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: Literature, Modernity, and Diaspora*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. (13 pages)
- Workshop -- Primary Sources analysis.

Recommended Reading:

- Edited by Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith, *Temples for tomorrow : looking back at the Harlem Renaissance* , Indiana University Press, 2001.

Week 10 -- 4/4/2023 -- The Jazz Age.

- **Deadline to select a format for the Final Project**

- Introduction (13 pages), Chapter One (57 pages) & Chapter Two (43 pages), in T. Denean Sharpley Whiting, *Bricktop Paris: African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars*, SUNY Press, 2015.
- Workshop -- Primary Sources

Recommended Reading:

- Stovall, Tyler, *Paris Noir, African Americans in the City of Light*, 2012.
- Chapter Eight, "Jessie Fauset and Gwendolyn Bennett" from Fabre, Michel, *From Harlem to Paris, Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1991.
- Stovall, Tyler, "Gender, Race, and Miscegenation: African Americans in Jazz Age Paris," in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2003, pp. 21-33

Week 11 -- 4/11/2023 -- Performance

- Introduction, Chapter Four in Archer-Straw, Perrine, *Negrophilia, Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, Thames & Hudson, 2000.
- Prologue and Chapter One in Jules-Rosette, Bennetta, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2007.
- Workshop -- Primary Sources

Week 12 -- 4/18/2023 -- Négritude & postwar Paris Noir

- Chapter 5 & 6 from Kaplan, Alice, *Dreaming in French*, University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Sharpley-Whiting, T Denean, "Erasures and the Practice of Diaspora Feminism", *Small Axe*; Mar 2005; 129-133.
- Workshop -- Primary Sources

Recommended reading:

- Joseph-Gabriel, Annette, *Reimagining Liberation, How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire*, University of Illinois Press, 2019.
- Sharpley Whiting, T. Denean, *Négritude Women*, U of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Rabbitt Kara M., "Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature," *The French Review*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Feb., 2006), pp. 538-548.

Week 13 -- 4/25/2023

- No readings
- **In-class Final Presentations.**

Last day of classes April 28th

May 9th: Final project submission deadline

End of semester May 19th