

AFR 25 Paris Noir: Performances in the City of Light

Cross-listings: RLFR 25/COMP 25

Description: There are many ways that African diasporic culture has performed throughout past and present Paris. From the spectacle-making of Saartje Bartman as Hottentot Venus in the late 1800s to the honoring of American dancer Josephine Baker as the Queen of the Colonial Exposition in 1931, the female African diasporic body has been a source of exoticism and desire in Paris. The privileging of African masks and sculptures in the visual art of Man Ray and Pablo Picasso in the early 20th century characterized the African body as primitive, simple and close to the earth. The sounds of jazz traveling to Paris via the concerts of such greats as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington in the 1930s further conflated notions of African and African diasporic cultures, while also exciting (and sometimes scaring) the French listening public. The mid-twentieth century brought Afro-Caribbean writers Frantz Fanon and Jeanne and Paulette Nardal as well as African American writers Richard Wright and James Baldwin; their African diasporic literature performed political dissent. Today hip hop culture is alive and well in Paris. Morphing beyond its Bronx beginnings, hip hop performers from West and North Africa now reign, dancing and spitting from La Place in the 1st arrondissement to Saint-Denis in the out skirted banlieues. In sum, throughout the ages African diasporic performance has persistently found breeding ground in Paris. Taught in English, this winter study travel course allows students to immerse themselves in past and present Paris via literary, filmic, artistic, musical and cultural performances of the African diaspora. In the first four days of winter study, students will engage with literature, historical essays, film, and music in preparation for their immersive trip to Paris. These classes will be two hours long; a course packet will be created and Glow audiovisual materials posted for homework assignments. Next students will commence a 10-day field trip to the City of Light, their task to observe multiple African diasporic performances as they engage in some of the following activities and venues: jazz clubs, a city tour, a tour of African American writers and artists in Paris, hip hop workshop, art museum exhibitions, a meal at a Senegalese restaurant, desserts from Arab bakeries, visit La Goutte d'Or of the 18th arrondissement (an area of predominately African diasporic population), and meet with professional musicians, writers and filmmakers in Paris. Students are required to maintain a travel journal and create an original final performance for the class. This performance could take many forms; it could be a short film documentary, song, spoken word performance, collage, photo essay, dance, or play. After returning to campus, students will reconvene to present their short performances. Note: All applicants for this winter study should write a 1-page double-spaced report that describes their experience traveling abroad, motivation for joining the course, and any prior courses and/or background in African diasporic performance.

Method of evaluation/requirements: final project; travel journal

Prerequisites: none; no previous travel to France or French language proficiency is necessary; not open to first-year students

Enrollment limit: 10

Selection process: preference will be given to majors and concentrators in Africana Studies, French, and Comparative Literature; priority will also be given to students who have never had an experience studying abroad and/or upperclassmen

Cost to student: \$3500

Meeting time: everyday (except Sat. and Sun.) until departure on Jan. 9, 10, Or 11

Instructor(s): Rashida Braggs; Christophe Kone