

Paris Noir

Black Poetry & Performance in the City of Light

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Description

This course focuses on a crucial period and location in the intellectual and artistic histories of the black Diaspora: Jazz-Age France. From the teens to the second world war, black artists, students, writers, and musicians, and many others from all over the world found themselves and each other in France. Their mutually stimulating encounters produced dialogs and debates that shaped contemporary ideas about the meaning of race, of poetry, and of modernity.



The corpus of writers we will take on in this course come from the United States and the Caribbean, from East Saint Louis and Harlem to Martinique and Haiti, with Jamaica and French Guiana in between. They converge on a city and country whose cultural frameworks, in the form of publishing houses, performance venues, and institutional traditions, would profoundly inflect their understandings and expressions of their place in history, in the word, and in the world. We will read fiction by Claude McKay (*Banjo*), selections of poetry from the anthology *The New Negro : Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (edited Alain Locke), Aimé Césaire's epic poem *Notebook of a Return to my Native Land*, and a collection of poems by Léon Gontran Damas. The critical essays we will read come from the Locke anthology, the 1956 Congress for Black Artists and Writers, and contemporary scholarship on "Jazz-Age France. We'll also watch and listen to performances by Josephine Baker, Sydney Bechet, Adelaide Hall, Will Marion Cook, and several others.