

NEGRIITUDE: FRANCOPHONE POETICS OF BLACKNESS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

French 400, Section 34280

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*J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
dans leurs souliers
dans leur smoking
dans leur plastron
dans leur faux-col
dans leur monocle
dans leur melon*

[...]

*J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
parmi eux complice
parmi eux égorgeur
les mains effroyablement rouges
du sang de leur ci-vi-li-sa-tion*

"SOLDE" *PIGMENTS*
LÉON GONTRAN DAMAS



DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the intellectual and artistic energy of a pioneering generation of French-speaking black poets and thinkers from the Caribbean and Africa, spanning from the height of French imperialism between the Great Wars to the waves of imperial decolonization under various forms. Negritude writers forged new poetic voices to articulate the meaning and experience of blackness in their time, all while delivering foundational critiques of race, imperialism, and colonial culture relevant for us today. Today contemporary scholars are reconsidering their many different ideas about the meaning of blackness, the relationship between politics and culture, the role of the poet, and the definition of freedom (to name just a few key questions). As they built historic transnational solidarities devoted to tackling the "black problem," they engaged in heated debates about the basis of those solidarities and the right way black people in the world could advance towards a better future. This course investigates key debates in the negritude movement put forth in poems and essays by Aimé Césaire, Léon Gontran Damas, Léopold Sédar Senghor, René Depestre, Guy Tirolen, and others, and discusses their legacy for us today. **This course will be conducted entirely in French.**

READINGS

The readings consist of poems, essays, and secondary scholarship on the history of black radical poetry. There are four texts required for purchase at the bookstore: three books of poetry and one reader consisting of poetry and critical essays. **All primary texts are in French, many have not been translated.**

- 1) Aimé Césaire. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Présence Africaine, 2000.
- 2) Aimé Césaire. *Discours sur le colonialisme*. Présence Africaine, 2000.
- 3) Senghor, Leopold Sedar. *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*
- 4) Course Reader