CAS HI 268 / CAS LF 344 Postcolonial Paris

Credits: 4

Professor: Dr. Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye (mailto: ambdj@bu.edu)

Schedule: 16 two-and-a-half-hour sessions over 7.5 weeks
(Tuesday & Thursday – 9:30 to 12 pm + 2 additional sessions)

Office hours: Tuesday 12-12:30, and by appointment

Course visits:
- Musée du Quai Branly
- Paris mosque and the Latin quarter
- Parisian neighborhood la Goutte d’Or
- Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration

Course material:
- A course pack with all required readings (to be purchased by each student).

I. COURSE PRESENTATION AND OUTCOMES

This course is a postcolonial approach to the history of both Paris and France in general, at the nexus of colonialist, immigration, and urban histories. Throughout the course, students will examine both the history of French colonial expansion and the extent of its influence on French culture as well as anticolonial movements in West Africa, the Maghreb, and France. The history of immigration and emigration will be studied with a focus on migrant housing and working conditions in the decades following colonial independence. Finally, the course will conclude by interrogating the political stakes of the colonial legacy in France and the social destiny of the “second generation”, notably through the lens of the unrest of 2005.

Student participation is essential during each class, which will include a mixture of discussion, lecture, debate, viewing of film clips, and guided visits to notable sites in Paris. Students are expected to read the assigned texts and view the assigned films before the class in which they will be covered.

Students will also be evaluated upon their ability to conduct an investigation of a Parisian neighborhood or emblematic site, including research, on-site visit and meeting with inhabitants, trying to understand to which extent it should or not be qualified as postcolonial.

Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will have developed

- a knowledge of major dates and events of colonization and decolonization history in the French Empire, an awareness of the importance of colonial transactions and of intermediaries’ key roles and an overall understanding of theoretical aspects of colonial history;
• a knowledge of two Parisian museums related to colonial legacy (Musée du Quai Branly and Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration), of their collections and site genealogies, and hence the ability to view a museum from an analytical perspective;
• an understanding of the main current issues and stakes related to the colonial past, an awareness of the political use of memory and oblivion, and hence the means to interpret and discuss militant positions about colonial period oblivion;
• a knowledge of at least one Parisian cosmopolitan neighborhood, of its location, of its relation to different waves of immigration (postcolonial or not), notions of urban anthropology and an understanding of the issues related to the concept of diversity as viewed by different players;
• a methodical approach in reading historical or anthropological specialized literature written in French or in English, allowing to identify main themes and raised issues and produce oral or written reports showing understanding of texts’ ideas and implications.

II. ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Oral presentation and written report (20%): Students will give a 10-minute oral presentation on a given topic (based on an academic article or book chapter) with an accompanying 2-page written report, both in French. The subjects and dates of each presentation will be decided on in conversation with the professor during the first week of class.

Essay (20%): Each student will write an essay of at least three pages (typed, double-spaced) in French on a monument, neighborhood, or historical site in Paris, analyzing its postcolonial aspects. The essay will be a descriptive narrative of the site or monument from the perspective of its colonial, migratory, or postcolonial influences. Each student must also interview local inhabitants of the area and incorporate these interviews into their report. Images and maps may accompany the text. Examples of sites include the former Palais des Colonies, or the Belleville or Goutte d’Or neighborhoods of Paris. The professor will provide a list of suggestions during the first week of class. The writing of this essay will be supported by the study in class of methodological aspects related to urban anthropology.

Visit report (10%): Students will write a report of at least two pages (typed, double-spaced) inspired by the visit of the Musée du Quai Branly. The report will focus on one item chosen from the permanent collection, which will be presented through an accounting of its history from its fabrication to the present time, and will analyze the intellectual and aesthetic reasons for its presence in the museum. This report will rely on readings studied in class and will result in a questioning about the way artifacts are exhibited and the importance attached to their history, most often related to the colonial period.

Two Exams (20% + 20%): The midterm and final exams will cover, respectively, the first and second halves of the course. Students will have access to a dictionary during each exam. The format and specific content of each exam will be provided beforehand.

Participation (10%)

Attendance policy: Due to the condensed schedule of the course, attendance at every session is crucial. Missing even one class will both gravely affect your grade and disrupt your comprehension of the themes of the course.

1 unexcused absence = -1 point on the final grade (up to 2)
3 or more unexcused absences = F grade for the course
Absence during exam or presentation = Grade of 0 for the assignment
Excused absences must be justified within one day of the missed class.
Late policy: The professor reserves the right to deny a student arriving late admittance to the class and/or to count the tardy as ½ or 1 absence. Tardiness will also affect the student’s Participation grade. Assignments handed in late are subject to a lowering of the grade. Assignments will not be accepted more than one week late and will be given an automatic F.

Academic Conduct Code: All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students in a Boston University program for cheating on exams or for committing plagiarism may be “expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on the Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean.” The full Boston University Academic Conduct Code is available at

III. CALENDAR

Session 1. Introduction, seminar presentation
An urban space and its history: traces, memory and oblivion of the colonial time
Historical landmarks: colonialism and its aftermath; Paris and the French Empire.

In-class reading:

Session 2. Conquest and colonialism
Colonial connections and transactions: current approaches in (post)colonial studies.
Historical landmarks (continued)
Colonialism, power and knowledge.

Reading:

Session 3. Black culture and politics in Paris from the interwar period to the 1950s.
Anticolonial movements in Paris.

Reading:

Optional reading/ suggestion for student presentation:

Session 4. Colonial Representations and Staging the Otherness
Primitivism and modernism.
Presentation of the distinct museums of “the others” established in Paris throughout the 20th century. Debates surrounding the opening of the Musée du Quai Branly and on current ethnographic museums.

Film:
In-class reading:

Session 5. VISIT: Musée du Quai Branly
Meeting at 6.30 pm at the Museum’s ticket office.

Session 6. From colonized to « Muslims »
« Islam français » from the interwar period to the 1950s, presentation of its sites in the greater Paris region. Preparation of the visit of the Mosquée de Paris.

Reading:

Session 7. The Algerian war in Paris

Reading:

Session 8. MIDTERM EXAM
Workshop about essays

Session 9. VISIT: Mosquée de Paris
Meeting at 10.00 am in front of the Mosquée de Paris (2 place du Puits de l’Ermite - 5e Paris)

Session 10. Immigrant neighborhoods and ‘banlieues’ : social and racial segregation in the greater Paris
Theoretical outline of the links between race and class in French social sciences. Historical landmarks on social and immigrant geography of Paris and its area in the 20th century.

Reading:

Session 11. VISIT: la Goutte d’Or (Parisian neighborhood)
Meeting at 10.00 am at Institut des Cultures d’Islam, 56 rue Stephenson, 75018 Paris.

Presentation on the waves of labor migration, on the working conditions of workers and on the struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.

Reading:
Session 13. Paris, city of immigration : 2. Living conditions
Social history of the housing conditions of North and West African migrants in Paris. Focus on the housing dedicated to single men, their political struggles, based on maps and iconographic documents.

Reading:

Session 14. VISIT: Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration
Meeting at 10.00 am in front of Palais de la Porte Dorée - 293 Avenue Daumesnil – Paris 12e

Session 15. (Post)colonial memories and immigrant memories
The resurgence of colonial memories in French public debates in the 2000s.

Reading:

ESSAY DUE.

Session 16. Conclusion

FINAL Exam (Last Friday)
IV. ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY


