

The Department of Romance Studies, the African Studies Program, the African American Studies Program, and the Center for the Study of Europe present:

# Memories of Slavery and French Public Discourse: A Lecture by Françoise Vergès

**Tuesday, November 18, 2014 | 12:30 p.m.**

Marie-Guillemine Benoist, *Portrait d'une négresse*, 1800, Paris, Musée du Louvre, © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot's *Portrait d'une négresse* was commented on by Shuck

After a long marginalization in French history and culture, colonial slavery became a reference to the women, children and men who identified with those who had been enslaved in the French colonies. It was used to question the French national narrative and local pervasive inequalities, to explore the role and place of racial thinking in the making of French society and culture, and to analyze its contemporary legacies both in France and in its former colonies that had become French departments in March 1946.

The Taubira Law which recognized in May 2001 slave trade and slavery as a “crime against humanity” marked a turning point: in 2006, May 10th became the national day of commemoration of the memories of slave trade, slavery and their abolition and in 2012, the Memorial of the Abolition of Slavery opened in Nantes, the largest in the world dedicated to the struggle against slavery. Progress has been made in the fields of education, research and culture. Yet, it is fair to ask in which ways the field opened by the struggle for recognition has been led astray, emptied of its radical promise of bringing back the idea of social justice. And to wonder where and how memories are revived to escape their instrumentalization.

Françoise Vergès is Titulaire de la Chaire “Global South(s)”, at the Collège d'études mondiales, (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme), Paris. She is the author of 10 books, two of which translated into English. She has published extensively on postcolonial theory, creolization, psychoanalysis, slavery and the economy of predation and Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. She has also directed two movies on the great Caribbean authors Aimé Césaire and Maryse Condé and organized a few exhibitions at the Louvre on slavery and women.

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