CAS LF 344 POSTCOLONIAL PARIS:
A Cultural and Political History of Colonization and Immigration in the French Capital
PROFESSOR: Dr. Jean-Philippe DEDIEU

PRESENTATION

This course is built around the focal point of a journey through postcolonial Paris, as a witness to the often conflicting colonial memories in 20th century and modern day France. This course was designed as an introduction to colonial history and the history of immigration in France by interpreting a certain number of memory sites that enable us to understand the trace of the so-called era of “the greatest France” in the metropolitan territory.

It is also indicated by the presence of an immigrant population in a particular place: the colonial territory is a reservoir of labor for the metropolis that is associated with periods of economic boom in France. Bordering between these two faces of France and postcolonial Paris, we will try to understand what sort of culture could have emerged from this multifaceted contract between France and other lands, whether African or Asian. We will thus attempt to understand what institutional marks this history left behind: street names, memorial plaques. One class will be dedicated to the reconstruction of a violent colonial and Parisian event, one during the Algerian war: the rally of October 17, 1961, violently repressed by the police forces. We will try to understand how this event unfolded and how its memory (or its fall into oblivion) is transmitted – by an activist memory, then by a form of official acknowledgment.

This postcolonial history of Paris is a way to journey through more than a century of French history and to understand contemporary Paris. The classes will finish with debates around questions raised by certain activist groups in neighborhoods with strong immigrant populations: are these territories, still today, marks of colonization or of colonized territories?

Work in this course will be composed of analytical commentaries on texts and other documents. Oral presentations by students based on these analyses will serve as a jumping off point for class discussions. Four class visits around Paris, and film excerpts will also be incorporated into some classes. Students will have either readings or films assigned to prepare for class ahead of time. Students will be evaluated on their capacity to discover a place, and to investigate and ask questions. They will complete an essay on a neighborhood of Paris in order to try to understand in what ways this neighborhood could be considered postcolonial. To complete the assignment, students must conduct some research on the area, as well as visit and describe the place, but also speak with people who live there.

EVALUATION

1) Oral presentation: Analysis of a document for a minimum 10 minute presentation and written summary. Students must consult with the professor at least once before presenting.
2) Essay based on a monument, neighborhood, or symbol of Paris of the student’s choice. Students must visit the site and talk with local residents to complete their investigation.
3) Final Exam based on the totality of the course: lectures, readings, presentations, visits, class discussions.

GRADING

Participation in discussions and debates: 25 %
Oral presentation including written summary: 20%
Essay: 25 %
Final exam: 30 %

CLASS VISITS

There will be three required class visits, accompanied by the professor
- Quai Branly Museum
- National Museum of the History of Immigration, in the former “Palace of the colonies”
- Visit of the Mosque of Paris


