

Global Awareness 203: Contemporary France: A Cultural Mosaic

Trip Report, Paris & Toulouse, May 12-27, 2013

By Dr. Philip Ojo and Dr. Nicole Stamant

Fourteen Agnes Scott students¹ participated in the trip component of *Global Awareness 203: Contemporary France: A Cultural Mosaic*, which took place in France, May 13-27, 2013. Prior to the trip, participants were enrolled in *Global Awareness 203* during the spring semester of 2013. The course instructors, Dr. Philip Ojo, from the Department of French, and Dr. Nicole Stamant, from the Department of English, encouraged students to reconsider their ideas about demographics in contemporary France, as they led discussions about immigration patterns and policies, as well as issues of assimilation and integration.

Students on this trip listened to lectures by French scholars on topics as diverse as the colonial and postcolonial traditions of France and its former colonies and the history of global immigration patterns. They visited a variety of cultural sites, religious spaces, and museums, and traversed various ethnic neighborhoods of Toulouse and Paris. The objective of these activities was to provide participants with a comprehensive view of the multiculturalism already an essential part of daily French existence.

There were guided visits to the African Quarter, Chinatown, Little India, the Latin Quarter, and Montmartre; there were outings to the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* (the museum of immigration), the *Musée Guimet*, the Louvre's new collection of Islamic Art, and the *Institut du Monde Arabe*, as well as tours of religious spaces, like the *Sacré Cœur*, *la Grande Mosquée de Paris*, and several Hindu and Buddhist temples around Paris.

Woven into the days was ample opportunity to visit those quintessentially Parisian sites that make lists of "things to see." There were small group or individual visits to the *Champs Elysées*, the *Arc de Triomphe*, the Louvre, the *Musée d'Orsay*, the *Centre Pompidou*, Shakespeare and Company, the Eiffel Tower, *Notre Dame*, and various of the city's gardens, including the *Jardin de Luxembourg* and the *Jardin de Buttes Chaumont*. Some participants walked through the streets of the 9th district, home to *Haynes*², a famous African-American landmark in Paris.

¹ Dominique Austin ('16), Heather Balenger ('15), Olivia Bello ('14), Amaris Bronner ('15), Chandler Converse ('14), Monica Gresham ('13), Maija Hatton ('14), Megan McCulloch ('13), Maria Meade ('13), Nishat Mhamud ('15), Peyton Nalley ('15), Amy Pipher ('15), Helene Somda ('15), and Tierraney Richardson ('13).

² Opened in 1949, this soul food restaurant (located on *rue Clauzel* in the 9th district) was a lifesaver for Black GIs hankering for some home-style fatback and sausages. In the 50s and 60s, it gathered together the famous – Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison; the stars – Elizabeth Taylor, Brigitte Bardot; and the locals. And right up until its closing in April 2009, visitors to Paris came looking to sample that last taste of African-American history in Paris.

Likewise, participants were able to experience the incredible bounty of ethnic foodways Paris offers. Dining at restaurants featuring Senegalese, Chinese and Vietnamese, Indian, French, Breton, and Japanese cuisine, participants were exposed to flavors and techniques that were often unfamiliar but always exciting.

Roughly halfway into the trip, participants shifted their attention to Toulouse and the Pyrénées in the south of France. As in Paris, there were guided tours of immigrant neighborhoods, including the *Mirail* and *Empalot*, along with two comprehensive tours of Toulouse itself, long a city of immigrant sensibilities because of its unique position between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and on the border with what is now Spain. Participants also enjoyed a day visit to the Pyrenean town of Germ.

Such a wide variety of experiences allowed participants a far more comprehensive and immersive experience of contemporary France than our Agnes Scott-based course could, and reinforces the importance of Global Awareness opportunities. In fact, while there, participants were able to connect with an ASC alumna, Annie Kuo '99, who joined the trip for a day. This rare chance allowed students to both meet and engage with an alumna and for the alumna to see the kinds of work current ASC students are doing.

The students' final projects for the course, which ranged from traditional research paper to photo essay to video, demonstrate the variety of successes of the trip. Students smartly focused on French and ethnic foodways, compared American and French cultural norms, political posters and citizenship, and interrogated the role of the individual in contemporary France.

Global Awareness 203 allowed participants to have a quasi-immersive experience in which they were exposed to people, places, and perspectives vastly different from their own and from the ones with which they were hitherto familiar. Privileging on-the-ground attention to oft-neglected communities and neighborhoods forced students to engage with France as it truly is—diverse, complicated, unsettled—rather than as it is in their imaginations. As such, participants received an unparalleled opportunity to learn about the incredible variety of people who inhabit and comprise contemporary French society.

Special thanks to all the participants for their cooperation throughout the trip. Our deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Jennifer Lund, Director of the Office of International Education, Ms. Clementine Hakizimana, the Program Coordinator, and Professor Lucie Laureillard³ and her team including Julie Gubbini and Professor Seloua Luste Boulbina of College de France, for putting together such a fantastic program; it was a life-changing experience for all participants.

³ Professor Lucie Laureillard of CIEE (Council on International Education Exchange) was the trip coordinator in France.

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Testimonials by Participants

“I had a great time and an amazing experience in France [...] I am glad I had the opportunity to go” (Amaris Bronner, ‘15).

“Thank you for making this course and trip a memorable journey. I enjoyed every minute of it and continue to talk about all of our travels with the other students from the trip” (Olivia Bello, ‘14).

“Thank you again for such an amazing trip to France:) [...] The Global Awareness class was able to physically see the many different cultures that make up the French Mosaic [...], a picture of imperialism” (Chandler Converse, ‘14).

“No textbook or professor can teach me what I learned and observed [during the trip]” (Heather Balenger, ‘15).

“It was a much more realistic view than the idealistic one that is often portrayed on travel shows or classic French films. [...] Based on our meals we [literally] traveled to nine different countries: France, Senegal, China, Japan, India, Algeria, Turkey, Italy, and Mexico. What a true cultural mosaic of tastes!” (Helene Somda, ‘15).

“When I think of France I think of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Coco Chanel, fine dining, baguettes, drinking and chatting in cafés, wide-eyed petite brunettes, and of course the Eiffel Tower. After the recent global awareness trip to France new things that I never even considered come to mind. Now I think of Barbès-Rouchechouart, African music, women in hijabs, determined performers in the métro, delicious ethnic hole-in-the-wall restaurants, and countless amounts of colorful, controversial, and compelling street art” (Nishat Mhamud, ‘15).