

IFS:

NYU Institute of French Studies
@ Cantor Film Center & other NYU venues

BLACK EXPERIENCE IN FRENCH CINEMA

A FILM FESTIVAL
& CONFERENCE

April 11-13, 2019

CURATED BY
ISABELLE BONI-CLAVERIE

CO-PRESENTED WITH
NYU CINEMA STUDIES AND CENTER
FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURES

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In France, a country that is officially color-blind, where the word race is a taboo, and multiculturalism is seen as divisive, the black experience in cinema has faced many challenges. And yet, many black or white film directors have attempted to meet that challenge. They have written contraband or resistance films, sometimes inclusive films, and have woven links between Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and America.

The first African film that was ever made in France in the 1950s was titled *Africa on the Seine* – one can't make that up! At a time when segregation in the U.S. prevented Melvin Van Peebles from becoming a film director, he came to Paris to shoot his first feature in 1968, *The Story of a Three-day Pass*. Conversely, thirty years later, Isaach de Bankolé, the first famous black actor in the French movie industry, chose to move to the U.S. for lack of roles in France that could match the immense talent that Claire Denis's movies revealed. This epitomizes the paradoxes of French cinema.



In this program, I wanted to highlight the connections between films, history and the changing condition of black people in society. The festival focuses on three crucial dimensions of the black experience in France: the colonial legacy, the intersection of race and gender in the neoliberal city, and the changing dynamics of interracial couples.

We are delighted to invite you to explore these questions during three days of screenings and discussion. If cinema does not necessarily change the world, it does have the power to change those who watch films.

Isabelle Boni-Claverie
Curator of the festival, director, screenwriter and writer

As a racial minority in France, black people have long experienced tension between their lived reality, in which racial prejudice shapes policies and popular views about them, and the quasi prohibition to talk about race, because of the French republican tradition of color-blindness that denies the legitimacy of acknowledging racial difference. Building on a long intellectual and political tradition of anti-racist critique, a new generation of black men and women has mobilized to reject discrimination in all realms of their lives: social, political and cultural.



Because it is a quintessential vehicle of representations, cinema offers a site to think about the history of conflicting representations of black people in France, as well as the battle by black persons for greater inclusion in the movie industry. Our three-day film retrospective explores how French cinema has both shaped racial stereotypes and shattered prejudice, how the French movie industry has discriminated against black actors and directors while also giving voice and visibility to new artists.

Our festival curator, award-winning film-maker and screenwriter Isabelle Boni-Claverie (currently teaching at NYU's Institute of French Studies), has put together a remarkable program of films, including many that have rarely or never been screened in the U.S. Our panel discussions bring together top experts to explore changing representations of blackness in French cinema.

NYU's Institute of France Studies, a center for the multidisciplinary study of France and the francophone world, is thrilled to present this exciting event, made possible by the generous support of many partners at NYU and beyond.

Frédéric Viguier
Co-organizer of the event, Institute of French Studies, New York University

PROGRAM

Thursday April 11, 2019

Coming to terms with the colonial experience

12:00 PM @La Maison Française of NYU

Afrique sur Seine (Africa on the Seine)

Lumières Noires (Black Lights)

Followed by Q&A with **Rich Blint** (New-School)

3:00 PM @La Maison Française of NYU

Rue Cases Nègres (Sugar Cane Alley)

Followed by Q&A with **Muriel Wiltord** (Martinique Promotion Bureau)

6:00 PM @Cantor Film Center

Chocolat (Chocolate)

Introduction and Q&A with **Isaach de**

Bankolé

Panel: How does one move beyond colonialism through both cinematic and professional practice?

Moderated by **Isabelle Boni-Claverie**, with **Isaach de Bankolé** (actor), **Alice Diop** (film director) and **Lydie Moudiléno** (USC)

Friday April 12, 2019

Race and gender in the housing projects

12:00 PM @ Michelson Theater

Les Misérables (The Miserable People)

La Haine (Hate)

3:00 PM @Michelson Theater

Qu'Allah Bénisse La France (May Allah Bless France)

6:00 PM @Cantor Film Center

La Mort de Danton (Danton's Death)

Vers la tendresse (Towards Tenderness)

Panel: This conversation with film director Alice Diop explores stereotypes about black masculinity, and how to move beyond them.

Moderated by **Ed Guerrero** (NYU), with **Alice Diop** (film director), and **Trica Keaton** (Dartmouth)

PROGRAM

Saturday April 13, 2019

New intimacies across the racial line

10:30AM @Cantor Film Center

Femme nue, femme noire (Naked Woman,

Black Woman)

Premiere screening in the U.S.

Presented by **Isabelle Boni-Claverie**

12:00 PM @Cantor Film Center

The Story of a Three-Day Pass (La Permission)

2:30 PM @Cantor Film Center

Pour la Nuit (For The Night)

Mon amie Victoria (My friend Victoria)

Panel: Does interracial sex signal the end of race, or does it reproduce old patterns of gender and race-based domination in intimate settings?

Moderated by **Frédéric Viguier** (NYU), with **Cécile Bishop** (NYU), **Isabelle Boni-Claverie** (film director & screenwriter), **Sandrine Collard** (Rutgers)

THEATER LOCATIONS

La Maison Française of NYU

16 Washington Mews. New York, NY 10003

Michelson Theater - NYU Department of Cinema Studies

721 Broadway, 6th Floor. New York, NY 10003

Cantor Film Center

36 East 8th Street. New York, NY 10003

FILM DESCRIPTIONS

Program 1. Thursday April 11, 2019

Coming to terms with the colonial experience

Afrique sur Seine (Africa on Seine) - Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Jacques Mélo Kane, Mamadou Sarr, 1955, 21 min

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, a pioneer of African film, was the first black African student to study at the renowned Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (now La Fémis) in Paris. With two fellow students in 1955, he shot *Afrique sur Seine*, the first movie ever made by African filmmakers. Vieyra's groundbreaking work, which would inspire a new wave of African cinema, poses thought-provoking questions about African identity, culture and the future of Africans in Paris. Can Africa, asks Vieyra, exist on the banks of the Seine?

Lumières Noires (Black Lights) - Bob Swain, 2006, 52 min

September 1956: the first Congress of Black Writers and Artists takes place at the Sorbonne. Over three days, Africans, Caribbeans, and African Americans come to Paris to participate. Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon address questions about black identity and are joined by famous figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Édouard Glissant and James Baldwin. Through interviews with surviving members of the congress, as well as a variety of fascinating images, filmmaker Bob Swain shows how the event became a landmark, influencing countless other black artists and intellectuals to make advancements in the new field of anticolonialism.

Rue Cases Nègres (Sugar Cane Alley) - Euzhan Palcy, 1989, 103 min

Set in Martinique during the 1930s under French colonial rule, the film follows a young boy named José along his educational, spiritual and personal journey that hoists him from the sugar cane fields to opportunities beyond. The first Black director to ever receive a César Award, in 1984, Palcy presents us with a poignant story about family, community and self-discovery.

Chocolat - Claire Denis, 1988, 105 min

A young French woman, France, returns to Cameroon, where she grew up as the child of colonial administrators. Immediately, she is transported back to her life as a young girl with the family's African household servant, Protée. In the aftermath of colonialism, Claire Denis' semi-autobiographical César-nominated film explores questions of race, power, privilege and the legacy of French colonialism in West Africa.

FILM DESCRIPTIONS

Program 2. Friday April 12, 2019

Race and Gender in the Housing Projects

Les Misérables (The Miserable People) - Ladj Ly, 2017, 15 min

Pento, who has just joined the police force in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Paris, quickly learns his new colleagues' abusive practices. A young boy observes these wrong-doings and sparks community outrage. Winner of Best Narrative Short at the 2017 Brooklyn Film Festival and 2018 César Nominee for Best Short Film.

La Haine (Hate) - Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995, 98 min

After a mutual friend of three men (Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert) in a Parisian housing project is assaulted by a police officer and finds himself in a coma, riots break out. Filled with rage toward the police, Vinz swears to kill an officer if his friend dies. Within a day, everything changes... Beautifully shot, La Haine exploded onto the scene and introduced a new genre portraying the realities of the housing projects in France. An instant cult classic that still resonates today.

Qu'Allah Bénisse la France! (May Allah Bless France!) - Abd al Malik, 2014, 95 min

Signing the directorial debut of rapper Abd al Malik, this autobiographical film chronicles the life of Régis, a young artist who breaks from the drug-ridden streets of Strasbourg by turning to music, education and religion. Malik reflects on his personal journey saying, "I'm the kid that everyone told, 'You won't be able to study. You can't write, make music, or become famous.' And I've done all of those things." Shot in black and white, May Allah Bless France! is an homage to La Haine.

La Mort de Danton (Danton's Death) - Alice Diop, 2011, 64 min

25-year-old Steve is on a journey to transform his life. Without mentioning it to even his closest friends, Steve enrolls in an acting course at Le Cours Simon, one of France's most prestigious drama schools. As Steve fulfills his dream of becoming an actor, he reflects on his two divergent locales - the environment in which he lives, and the one in which he aspires to succeed.

Vers la tendresse (Towards Tenderness) - Alice Diop, 2016, 39 min

This documentary examines the lives of four men in the Parisian projects. Through their individual everyday accounts, they unveil rarely breached depths of manhood and masculinity. Its director, Alice Diop, is one of two black female directors to have won a César award in the Best Short Film category. During her acceptance speech, Diop dedicated her award to the youth and victims of police brutality in France.

FILM DESCRIPTIONS

Program 3. Saturday April 13, 2019

New Intimacies across the racial line

Femme Nue, Femme Noire (Naked woman, Black woman.) **US PREMIERE! a.k.a A Nous Deux France (Let's Measure Up, France)**

Désiré Ecaré, 1969, 60 min

This comedy-drama tells the story of Africans from Ivory Coast who have emigrated to France and their attempts to adapt to their new country. Upon arrival, the African women discover they must compete with white French women for the attention of African men as they learn to navigate a new culture of interracial relationships. Blues legend Memphis Slim provides music for the film.

The Story of a Three-Day Pass (La Permission) - Melvin Van Peebles, 1968, 80 min

Turner, a Black G.I. stationed in France, is given a three-day pass as a reward for his loyal service. On his first night in a nightclub, he meets French shop clerk Miriam, and the two develop a romance as they spend the weekend together, exploring the northern towns and beaches. A complex situation for Turner, the love affair is met with prejudice, racial taboos and an impending departure. Melvin Van Peebles initially wrote The Story of a Three-Day Pass as a French novel before adapting it into his first feature film.

Pour la nuit (For the Night) - Isabelle Boni-Claverie, 2004, 27 min

Muriel, a young mixed-race woman, travels to Marseille to attend her estranged mother's funeral. Unable to stand the heavy atmosphere created by her family, she escapes into town where she meets Sami who is celebrating his last night as a single man. A story of grief, identity, and new beginnings, For the Night has won several awards in international film festivals.

Mon Amie Victoria (My Friend Victoria) - Jean-Paul Civeyrac, 2014, 95 min

Forever changed by a night with an upper-class white family, young Victoria treads through life with the constant hope that she can return to this distant, tender memory. As Victoria grows older and experiences heartbreak, motherhood, and the stirring nuances of having a biracial child in today's Parisian society, her experiences illustrate the profound impact of how class differences are intertwined with racial struggles. Adapted from Doris Lessing's short novel, Victoria and the Staveneyns, Mon amie Victoria is a captivating tale of one black girl's dream.

ISAACH DE BANKOLÉ

Revealed in the theatre by Patrice Chéreau, he became famous to the general public with *Black Mic-Mac*, a successful comedy about Africans in Paris. In 1986, he was the first black actor to receive a César, an award from the French film academy. His work with film director Claire Denis, for whom he performed in *Chocolat*, allowed him to explore deeper roles. He starred in four movies with Jim Jarmush. He has been living in the United States for several years, alternating between auteur films and big productions such as *Black Panther*.



On April 11th Isaach de Bankolé joins us to present *Chocolat*, and to discuss the power of film to move the conversation about French colonialism forward.

ALICE DIOP

After studying history and sociology, she made her first documentaries in the wake of the 2005 race riots in France. In 2007, she left France for Senegal to produce *Les Sénégalaises et la Sénégalaise* (*The Senegalese Women and the French-Senegalese Woman*). She received critical acclaim for *La Mort de Danton* (*Danton's Death*) (2011), a documentary about a young man from the housing projects facing prejudice in his Parisian theater school. In 2016, she directed *La Permanence* (*The Dispensary*) as well as *Vers la tendresse* (*Towards Tenderness*), a subtle exploration of the sexuality of young black men, for which she earned the César for Best Short Film. Alice Diop is currently preparing a feature documentary on Seine Saint-Denis, one of the poorest departments in France.



On April 12th, she presents *La Mort de Danton* and *Vers la Tendresse*, and joins us for discussion about gender and race in the housing projects.

PARTICIPANTS

Cécile Bishop is Assistant Professor of French Literature, Thought and Culture at New York University. She works on postcolonial francophone literatures and visual culture, with a particular emphasis on the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, and the representation of race in French culture. Her first book, *Postcolonial Criticism and Representations of African Dictatorship: The Aesthetics of Tyranny*, was published by Legenda in 2014.

Ed Guerrero is Associate Professor of Cinema Studies, and Africana Studies, at New York University. His books, including *Framing Blackness*, and *Do the Right Thing*, explore black cinema's cultural, political and aesthetic history, as well as its critical discourse.

Frédéric Viguier is a sociologist. He is Clinical Associate Professor at New York University's Institute of French Studies. His work focuses on inequalities in contemporary France and the Francophone world, how they are perceived and represented, whether they are corrected through social policies and education. He is currently working on a book that examines the paradoxical persistence of French education in Morocco since Moroccan independence.

Isabelle Boni-Claverie is a writer, film and television screenwriter, and director. She wrote and directed the documentary *Too Black to Be French?*, and the book with the same title, which was published in 2017 by Tallandier.

Lydie Moudileno is Professor in American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. Her research and teaching explore postcolonial literatures and arts from France and the Global South, with a focus on Africa and the Caribbean. She is the author of several books including *L'écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature*, *Parades postcoloniales*, and *Mythologies postcoloniales: Décoloniser le quotidien*.

PARTICIPANTS

Muriel Wiltord is the Director of the Martinique Promotion Bureau for the Americas. Trained in anthropology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, she works at the intersection of four cultures: African, Caribbean, French and North-American. She is particularly interested in the artistic and intellectual exchanges across the African diaspora.

Rich Blint is a scholar, writer and curator. He is Assistant Professor of Literature, and Director of the Ethnicity and Race concentration at the Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts at the New School. His upcoming books include *A Radical Interiority: James Baldwin and the Personified Self in Modern American Culture* and *A Queer Spirit: Incidents in the Life of the Americas*.

Sandrine Collard is a scholar and art curator. She is Assistant Professor of African Art History at Rutgers University. She works on post-colonialism in the arts, the representation of gender and domesticity, and the globalization of the contemporary art scene.

Trica Keaton is Associate Professor of Critical Race and African Diaspora Studies at Dartmouth College. Her research interests focus on constructs and lived experiences of race, racialization, racism and their intersections, as well as identity politics in France, Europe, and the U.S. Her book publications include *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, and Social Exclusion*; *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*; and *Black France-France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*.

CO-SPONSORS

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