Chapter 6
Black Paris

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Like many cities around the world, Paris erupted in protests after the George Floyd police killing in the USA in the summer of 2020. The largest was organized by activist Assa Traoré, the older sister of 24-year-old Adama Traoré, a young Black Frenchman who died in police custody in July 2016. Under the banner "Truth for Adama Traoré," the march drew 20,000 people who defied a government ban on demonstrations and stood in front of a Paris court to demand justice for Traoré. Four years earlier, Assa Traoré had founded Le Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama (Committee for Justice and Truth for Adama), declaring that her brother had died because of a racist system and vowing to keep his name alive. And during the 2020 demonstration, she drew parallels between Floyd and her brother, saying that they both died at the hands of the police (Martirosyan 2020).

It is this same racist system that invisibilizes Black people in France and makes them feel like second-class citizens. Although they have long called for increased equality and visibility, little has changed. Unlike anglophone countries such as the USA and the UK, France does not know the number of its Black population. Statistics based on race and ethnicities are outlawed. Moreover, in 2018, race was erased from the constitution in the belief that France is a color-blind society.[1] However, as long as France's ethnic makeup is denied, ensuring that Black residents are fully represented throughout society will be problematic. This includes representations of history that accurately reflect Black contributions to the country. And while it is true that some have been recognized, like well-known African American entertainer

1 The concept of color-blindness refers to not seeing race, as a way to ignore structural racism.

Josephine Baker, who became the first Black woman to be reinterred in the Panthéon in November 2021, some 46 years after her death, few Black French people receive this highest honor.[2] Three Black men have been inducted into the institution so far – Félix Éboué, the governor general of French Equatorial Africa (1949); author Alexandre Dumas (2002); and writer, politician, and cofounder of the Negritude movement Aimé Césaire (2011) (to be discussed later), whose remains are in his birthplace, Martinique. The Panthéon is the final resting place of some of France's most illustrious citizens, including writers Victor Hugo, Rousseau, and Voltaire and famed chemist Marie Curie. Traditionally, the French president names those worthy to be moved to the centuries-old monument.

During the 2020 protests, a group of French internet users called for the commemoration of Black historical figures in public places, promoting the #JeVeuxUneStatueDe (I want a statue of) hashtag. Among the suggestions were Suzanne Bélair, known as Sanité Bélair, a freedom fighter, revolutionary, and Black female lieutenant in Toussaint Louverture's army, who fought against the reinstatement of enslavement in Haiti. She was caught, tried by a colonial court, and executed in 1802.[3] Yet, her contribution has not yet been acknowledged by French society. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the number of renamings that have taken place in Paris since the demonstrations. They include a tribute to Claude Mademba-Sy, a soldier during World War Two; an alley near the Museum of Liberation in Paris's 14th arrondissement was named after him in August 2020. Sy, an unsung hero of the war, was an officer in France's Leclerc regiment and later cofounded the Senegalese army. He was the only Black person to enter Paris when it was liberated by the Americans (Chichizola 2020).

One month later the first statue of a Black woman in the city was unveiled in a public garden in the 17th arrondissement. It is of Solitude, a freedom fighter, born around 1772 to an enslaved African who was raped by a white sailor on the ship bringing her to the Caribbean. Solitude won her freedom after the French Revolution, but when Napoleon reinstated the enslavement

2 "Joséphine Baker to Enter French Panthéon of National Heroes," France24, August 22, 2021, (https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210822-jos%C3%A9phine-baker-to-enter-panth%C3%A9on-of-france-s-national-heroes)

3 "#JeVeuxUneStatueDe sort les figures noires françaises des oubliettes," *Brain*, July 15, 2020, (https://www.brain-magazine.fr/article/page-president/62671-Statues)

system in the French colonies, she joined Guadeloupe's resistance movement. Napoleon's military forces arrested the then pregnant Solitude and sentenced her to death. She was hanged the day after giving birth. The garden where Solitude's statue stands is close to a statue of General Alexandre Dumas – a man of African descent – which was destroyed by the Nazis when they occupied the city.[4]

Meanwhile, future plans to honor the victims of enslavement with a national memorial were suspended after a disagreement over its concept. The idea was first announced in 2016, when then president François Hollande called for the building of a memorial or museum recognizing France's role during enslavement. The only current marker to victims is an often overlooked large bronze sculpture of chains on the city's Left Bank (Machemer 2020). In June 2020, four years after the initial announcement, the French ministry of culture and the ministry for overseas territories issued an open call for artists to create the memorial, which would be housed in the Tuileries Gardens. The monument was to be conceived in partnership with the organizations Comité Marche du 23 mai 1998 (CM98) and the Slavery and Reconciliation Foundation, which had both campaigned for it. The winning artist was due to be announced in the first half of 2021, with the piece expected to be completed by the autumn of the same year. A dispute over the submitted designs, however, halted plans.

As the push to pay tribute to Black French contribution continues, Black people are calling for the removal of monuments and markers honoring colonialists and proponents of enslavement and racism. The main focus is the statue of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, which sits in front of the French National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament. The 17th-century minister under King Louis XIV authored the "Code Noir" for the French West Indies that outlined the rules and regulations of race and enslavement, describing enslaved peoples as "*êtres meubles*" (chattel). During the 2020 demonstrations, a member of the Brigade Anti Négrophobie committed a "political act," spray painting the statue with the words "state negrophobia."[5]

4 "Paris Inaugurates City's First Park Honouring a Black Woman," France24, September 26, 2020, (https://www.france24.com/en/20200926-paris-inaugurates-city-s-first-park-honouring-a-black-woman)

5 "France Colbert Row: Statue Vandalised Over Slavery Code," BBC, June 24, 2020, (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53163714)

Years earlier, in 2017, Louis-Georges Tin, president of the Representative Council of France's Black Associations (CRAN), had called Colbert the enemy of "liberty, equality, and fraternity," the motto of the French Republic. More recently, former French prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault called for places bearing his name to be changed (Dussart 2020).

Renaming other contested memorials is also an item on antiracism agendas. This includes one to Georges Cuvier, who has a street named after him in Paris's 5th arrondissement. Cuvier conducted racial studies that provided part of the foundation for scientific racism, and he published work on the supposed differences between racial groups' physical characteristics and mental abilities. Shortly after the death of Saartje Baartman, a young South African woman who was brought to Europe, given the stage name the "Hottentot Venus," and paraded in so-called freak shows in London and Paris in the 19th century, Cuvier examined her body. He disparagingly compared her physical features to those of monkeys. Meanwhile, a street and metro station named after General Jacques-François Dugommier, a supporter of enslavement, whose name is also inscribed in the Panthéon, are also being challenged (Chadwick 2020).

Karfa Sira Diallo, founder of the organization Sharing Memories,[6] which preserves the memory of colonization and enslavement, explained in June 2020:

> [T]he death of George Floyd has made it possible for many to make a link between the racism inscribed in the walls of cities, monuments, and squares and the issue of racist police violence. (Gueye 2020)[7]

Diallo called for some of the symbols honoring colonial traders and supporters to be removed and the remainder to be contextualized with explanations to preserve the memory of the crime against humanity and to teach current and future generations about it (Dussart 2020). For the historian Françoise Vergès, the removal of these statues is a matter of "memorial justice," which has "nothing to do with the erasure of history" (Vergès 2020).

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6 In the original: "Mémoires et Partages."

7 In the original: "La mort de George Floyd a permis à beaucoup de faire un lien entre le racisme sur les murs des villes, monuments et places et la question des violences policières racistes."

Château Rouge, Château d'Eau, and the Banlieues

A more accurate reflection of French history can be seen in cities such as Paris which has long been a center of Black life. The city's Black population grew quickly after World War Two and especially in the 1960s and 1970s, because France needed a workforce. Called "*Les Trente Glorieuses*" (The Glorious Thirty Years), a synonym for economic dynamism between 1945 and 1973, the period saw increased numbers of Africans and French Caribbeans arrive on France's shores. It was a symbiotic relationship. France needed more people to rebuild the country after the war and the newcomers needed to escape the economic crises, war, or other conflicts in their birthplaces. Many of them chose France, and especially Paris, because of the colonial relationship between the host country and their homelands. France was a powerful colonizer on different continents – Africa, the Americas, and Asia. At the end of the 19th century, as the second largest colonizing empire behind the UK, it was especially dominant in Africa (North, West, and Central). The population spoke the language imposed by its colonial masters, which was one of the major arguments used for recruiting workers from these regions.

In response, the French government created new housing projects in the suburbs (banlieues) for these new immigrants. Some 70 years later, the banlieues are still home to the Black working class who live outside Paris but work within the city; their modest incomes put the capital's highly priced accommodation beyond their reach. Although they live predominantly in places such as Saint-Denis, Créteil, Sarcelles, or Aubervilliers, there are areas special to the Black population within the city's walls. For the African diaspora, Château Rouge and Château d'Eau provide a connection to their culture. As far back as the 1960s, grocery stores selling food from their faraway motherlands helped Black communities adjust to their new country. And in the following two decades, especially the 1980s, the concentration of stores catering to Blacks also increased in the north of Paris, where African immigrants used to live before gentrification pushed them out.

Nicknamed "Little Africa," Château Rouge is located between the famous Sacré-Cœur basilica and Montmartre in the 18th arrondissement. It has been a hub for African businesses selling food, cultural products, cosmetics, and clothing for Black people since 1990. Meanwhile, further south, the smaller Château d'Eau, in the 10th arrondissement provides hairdressing services and cosmetics. These products are important to Black people, who

did not see themselves represented in advertising images and traditionally have not been served by major cosmetics firms, which did not consider the market as profitable. After the riots of October and November 2005, when mostly French Arab and Black residents were involved in four weeks of urban violence in the banlieues, the government finally became aware that it was time to give more opportunities to minorities. In June 2005, French president Jacques Chirac started talking about stopping discrimination in France. "Discrimination is a poison for our democracy and our national cohesion," he said. On July 17, 2006, journalist Harry Roselmack became the first Black man to host the news on the leading French television channel TF1.[8] It was a beginning – and, since then, efforts to diversify have been moving forward step by step, even though there is still a long way to go.

The area is popular with independent traders originally from North and West Africa who sell cigarettes, hot corn, or drinks at metro exits. There are also a few restaurants serving food from the African continent. While both Château Rouge and Château d'Eau remain centers of Black economic life, the banlieues such as Sarcelles are home to a large Black community made up largely of people of Caribbean and African origin. The residents come from a variety of countries, with most Caribbean people from Martinique and Guadeloupe and Africans mainly from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon. But all face poverty, unemployment, and sometimes violence at higher rates than their neighbors in the center of Paris. French radio France Inter said that, according to a survey from November 2018 to January 2019, residents have 20 percent less chance of receiving a response when applying for a job offer and 30 percent less chance of being contacted again after a spontaneous application.[9]

The history of Sarcelles perfectly symbolizes a city built through post-World War Two immigration, although French colonization had already brought many Black people to the country. During the 1950s and 1960s, projects were created in order to house the "*pieds-noirs*" and Jews from Algeria. The "*pied-noirs*" were French and other people of European origin who were born in

8 TF1 découvre la télé couleur (https://www.liberation.fr/medias/2006/07/17/tf1-decouvre-la-tele-couleur_46234/

9 Discrimination à l'embauche : les résultats de la campagne de testing passée sous silence par le gouvernement https://www.franceinter.fr/economie/discrimination-a-l-embauche-les-resultats-de-la-campagne-de-testing-passee-sous-silence-par-le-gouvernement

Algeria during the period of French rule from 1830 to 1962 and had to return to France at the end of the Algerian War. They left everything behind in North Africa. Like them, Jews from Algeria also had to move to France and reestablish their lives when the former *département* became an independent country in 1962. As Algeria was considered a French *département* for almost a century, its independence was judged as blasphemy by the French government.

Figure 6.1: Monument to the African tirailleurs – the well-known soldiers who fought alongside the French during World Wars One and Two. Photograph: Epée Hervé Dingong, 2022

Among the immigrants were the sons and daughters of African *tirailleurs* – the well-known soldiers who fought alongside the French during World Wars One and Two. Following the oil crisis of 1973–9, which slowed immigration, new arrivals came to Sarcelles as families from the continent reunified. The soldiers are now honored in their descendants' place of settlement with a monument outside the train station.[10] Unveiled in May 2018, former Sarcelles's mayor François Pupponi and deputy mayor Youri Mazou-Sacko, a former community leader of Central African origin, were responsible for its erection. This monument has three parts: To the right and left are African soldiers with their special uniforms from World Wars One and Two. In the center an inscription reads: "In honor of the brave African soldiers who participated in the liberation of France."[11]

10 Le long combat des abolitions," (https://memorial.nantes.fr/en/the-long-struggle-for-abolition/)

11 In the original: "Honneur aux valeureux soldats africains qui ont participaté a la liberation de la France."

Unfortunately, in the year following its unveiling, the monument was defaced.[12] Sarcelles mayor Patrick Haddad called the action shocking, especially since the monument had been so recently erected. According to him, it was "fractured and cut in two" and could not be repaired; instead, it was rebuilt to look like it had before.[13]

This is not the only monument to Black people in Sarcelles. The area's significant Caribbean community has also seen the accomplishments of its heroes honored. One of the most prominent monuments is for Aimé Césaire (1913–2008). The Martinquais was one of a triptych – also known as "*les trois pères*," which also included Senegalese-born Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001), and Léon-Gontran Damas (1912–78), who was from French Guiana. They co-founded the anti-colonialist French literary, artistic, philosophical, and political movement Negritude, which will be discussed in the next section. Inaugurated in November 2010, in the presence of Césaire's grandson Christophe, the bronze bust was sculpted by Guadeloupean artist Jean-Claude Nasso, who is committed to the recognition of Caribbean culture. From the top of its black pedestal, at human height, it oversees the Place Jean-Pierre Passé-Coutrin, where it is located, as well as the lively surrounding Flanades district. A brief introduction written under the bust says: "Emblem of Negritude, in his life he defended humanism and cultural identity."[14]

In May 2013, former mayor of Sarcelles François Pupponi unveiled a statue as part of a genealogy project spearheaded by CM98, in tribute to the victims of enslavement. The marble monument was also created by Nasso and features a rectangular structure with a globe. It is engraved with 213 names – first names, surnames, and numbers – arbitrarily attributed to former slaves freed

12 "Sarcelles: ouverture d'une enquête après la profanation d'un monument aux soldats africains," November 19, 2019, Le Monde/Agence France Presse (https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/19/sarcelles-ouverture-d-une-enquete-apres-la-profanation-d-un-monument-aux-soldats-africains_6019700_3212.html)

13 In the original (translated by the author): "C'est très attristant et très choquant de voir cette profanation sur une mémoire relativement fragile car encore récente … La stèle, 'fracturée en deux', n'est pas réparable, selon le maire: 'On partirait a priori sur une reconfection.'" https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/sarcelles-enquete-apres-la-profanation-d-une-stele-aux-soldats-africains-18-11-2019-2348088_23.php

14 Un buste en hommage à Aimé Césaire (https://www.leparisien.fr/val-d-oise-95/sarcelles-95200/un-buste-en-hommage-a-aime-cesaire-22-11-2010-1160410.php)

in Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1848. Of the 213 names, about 70 belong to the ancestors of Sarcelles residents. On the day of the unveiling, Caribbean residents surrounded Pupponi during the ceremony, rediscovering their ancestral history. CM98 has already retraced the route of 80 percent of some 157,000 Martiniquais and Guadeloupean enslaved who were given names after the abolition of slavery (Koda 2013). A similar monument can be found in Saint-Denis, another banlieue in the north of Paris.

Figure 6.2: Mural depicting Aimé Césaire in Sarcelles. Photograph: Epée Hervé Dingong, 2022

A second monument to Césaire is located on the front and the first floor of the Langfus library building: a fresco created in November 2016 by painter Jean-François Perroy, alias "Jef Aérosol," in association with the Galerie Mathgoth. It reads "Justice listens at the gates of beauty"[15] and is part of the "100 Walls for Youth" project, a national contemporary urban art project to teach young people about strong values: respect, solidarity, diversity, and tolerance (Chaffotte 2016).

Marking the Negritude Movement

Strongly influenced by the Harlem Renaissance in the USA, the Negritude Movement began in the 1930s after Césaire, Senghor, and Damas met as students in Paris and created the monthly journal *L'Étudiant Noir.* The publication attracted francophone writers of African descent and all three published works in the periodical; Damas published his first poems and Senghor his first articles. However, Negritude also drew on a burgeoning cultural

15 In the original: "La justice écoute aux portes de la beauté."

wave in Haiti (Bouchard 2009: 381), and its proponents had a connection to Pan-Africanism, discussed in Chapter 3.

In 1935, Césaire coined the word Negritude in the publication (Ako, cited in Miller 2010). The word encapsulated the self-affirmation of Black people and was an expression of a revolt against French colonialism and racism. He also used the term in his poem "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" (Journal of a Homecoming), a landmark of modern French poetry and a founding text of the movement.[16] In his book *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), Césaire would later critique the hypocrisy of justifying colonization and questioned the use of colonialism as well as its impact, calling Europe indefensible for its actions (Nye 2016). With their work, Césaire, Damas, and Senghor brought about increased consciousness and awareness of the Black situation in France. The movement allowed Black people to see themselves through their own eyes and understand their own qualities. Negritude was based on the idea that a common African diaspora identity was needed to overcome the social and political rhetoric of French colonialism and the resulting domination. It gave Black people the ability to communicate to whites that, from now on, Blacks would be asserting themselves (Sprague 2018).

In addition to literature, Negritude was also a philosophy of African art, as Senghor insisted. When he first arrived in Paris at the end of the 1920s, modern European art was already drawing on *art nègre* (Black art). Pablo Picasso, in particular, had already taken to making African sculptures and masks. However, Senghor wanted Negritude to be the ideology behind African art, particularly the forms so characteristic of African masks and sculptures across different regions and cultures. He explained that African art was not created to reproduce or embellish reality but to establish the connection with what he labeled the *sub-reality* that is the universe of vital forces.[17] In 1956, Senghor argued that Black culture must acknowledge its own traditions but combine this with an open approach to new ideas and developments in art. Artist Ben Enwonwu articulated this in "Problems of the African Artist Today," which was published in the journal *Présence Africaine* the same year (Enwonwu 1956). He called for an international African art that responded

16 The poem can be found on this website: (https://dukeupress.wordpress.com/2018/04/18/poem-of-the-week-14/)

17 Négritude, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *First published Mon May 24, 2010; substantive revision Wed May 23, 2018* (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/)

to contemporary life and times but was also aware of traditional, local, and global influences:

> I will not accept an inferior position in the art world … European artists like Picasso, Braque and Vlaminck were influenced by African art. Everybody sees that and is not opposed to it. But when they see African artists who are influenced by their European training and technique, they expect that African to stick to their traditional forms … I do not copy traditional art. I like what I see in the works of people like Giacometti but I do not copy them … I knew he was influenced by African sculptures. But I would not be influenced by Giacometti, because he was influenced by my ancestors.[18]

A decade later, Senghor organized the World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1966, providing the first occasion for many Black artists, musicians, writers, poets, and actors to participate in a global examination of African culture.

Meanwhile, Martiniquais psychiatrist and intellectual Frantz Fanon, a former student of Aimé Césaire, added practical and theoretical analysis of the traumatic effects of colonialism and racism to the discourse in his seminal works *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In an attempt to retrieve dignity for Black people from the horrific ordeal of enslavement, the pioneering postcolonial theorist and activist used his experiences during the French occupation of Algeria to explain the violent effects the system had on both the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon argued that, as long as the systems of enslavement and colonization existed, Black people would develop a sense of self only through the eyes of the white man, who, at the same time, developed a sense of self-superiority. In accordance with this idea, Senghor described the Negritude movement as "the sum total of the values of civilization of the Black world."[19]

In the history of the movement, the women who helped shape it are often forgotten – Paulette Nardal and her sister Jane in particular. A true pioneer, Paulette was the first Black female engineer in her birthplace, Martinique.

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18 Quoted from the website of the Tate gallery in the UK (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/negritude)

19 Négritude, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *First published Mon May 24, 2010; substantive revision Wed May 23, 2018* (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/)

Figure 6.3: Plaque for Jane and Paulette Nardal. Photograph: Epée Hervé Dingong, 2022

In 1920, she became the first Black person to study at the Sorbonne University in Paris, along with her sister; Paulette studied English and her sister literature. In 1928, the women joined the Pan-African newspaper *La Dépêche Africaine*. Additionally, Jane wrote the manifesto "Black Internationalism," a pioneering text about a united Black movement with African, African American, and Caribbean participation. In 1931, the sisters created *La Revue du Monde Noir* based on meetings in their salon in Clamart, a Paris suburb, where guests spoke French and English. They received poets, writers, musicians, and intellectuals from the Black diaspora, who shared drinks, music, and poetry, and often discussed topics such as colonialism, race issues, and other current political debates. Guests included Césaire, Senghor, and Damas (Terriennes 2021). In addition to writers, scholars, and musicians, the meetings also attracted visual artists who created works that not only acknowledged ancient African traditions but defined contemporary Blackness.

The Nardals were concerned about female inclusion:

> I have often thought and said, about the beginnings of *négritude*, that we were just unhappy women, my sister and I, and that is why we were never mentioned. It was understated because it was women talking about it.[20]

20 In the original (translated by the author): "J'ai souvent pensé et dit, à propos des débuts de la négritude, que nous n'étions que de malheureuses femmes, ma soeur et moi, et que c'est pour cela qu'on a jamais parlé de nous. C'était minimize, du fait que c'étaient des femmes qui en parlaient" (Grollemund 2018).

The women have been remembered, if only in a smaller way than their male peers. Based on a proposal from the Paris city hall and its council in November 2018, Mayor Anne Hidalgo approved the naming of a pedestrian walkway after the sisters. The following year, in August 2019, a plaque with the name "Promenade Jane and Paulette Nardal" was unveiled in the 14th arrondissement. It reads:

> Sisters, Women of Letters from Martinique Inspirers of the literary and political movement of Negritude Feminist militants[21]

The sisters' niece, singer Christiane Eda-Pierre, attended the unveiling, honoring her aunts who, as writers, philosophers, and teachers, laid the theoretical and philosophical bases of Negritude upon which Césaire, Senghor, and Damas built. Activists are now pushing to have a plaque for Paulette Nardal placed in the Panthéon. The Association Paulette Nardal at the Panthéon, whose members include Martiniquais filmmaker Euzhan Palcy, co-chair of the committee, has been bringing attention to her contribution to the feminist and Negritude movements, among others.[22] Her better-known colleague Césaire already has a plaque in his name in the Panthéon. Césaire passed away in 2008 and his body was taken back to Martinique. Three years later, in April 2011, in a national event presided over by the French president Nicolas Sarközy, the plaque was unveiled in the Parisian monument.

Other markers commemorating Césaire include the Quai Césaire in the 1st arrondissement. It was inaugurated in June 2013 and is part of the Quai des Tuileries. The site was chosen by the Paris municipal council in March 2013. The mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, hailed the memory of the Martiniquais poet who would have been 100 years old that year. The location is not far from another marker honoring an important figure of the Negritude movement. Initially known as Passerelle Solférino, a footbridge was renamed Passerelle Léopold-Sédar-Senghor in October 2006[23] to commemorate the

21 In the original: "Soeurs, Femme de Lettres martiniquaises / Egeries du Courant litteraire et politique / de la Négritude / Militantes feministe."

22 Paulette Nardal au Panthéon. Figure de Matrimoine National, Écrivaine, Feministe, et Précurseure du movement de la Négritude, (https://www.paulettenardalaupantheon.com/en/)

23 Passerelle Leopold Sedar Senghor footbridge in Paris (https://www.eutouring.com/passerelle_leopold_sedar_senghor.html)

100th anniversary of the birth of the Senegalese politician and poet, who was also the first president of Senegal, governing for two decades. Senghor was also the first African to be an elected member of the Académie Française.[24]

Another marker of the movement continues to educate today. The journal *Presence Africaine*, founded by Alioune Diop in 1947, set the tone, depth, and breath of decolonization aspirations of the Negritude movement. Early on, *Presence Africaine* was defined as the voice of the Black world in Europe, mainly in France. This voice contributed to proclaiming the end of white monologue and was a platform for many Black intellectuals and for creating awareness in the Black diaspora of its own condition (Lock 2013). As a magazine, it aligned with Pan-Africanism and gave voice to some already great figures of Negritude theory, including Césaire, Alioune Sarr, Senghor, Richard Wright, and Fanon, to name just a few.

In 1949, *Presence Africaine* expanded from its origins as a quarterly journal and became a publishing house and bookstore. Over the next several decades, a plethora of writers, such as Mongo Beti and Cheikh Anta Diop, also released books through the publisher. More than 60 years later, *Presence Africaine* continues to be an important cultural marker for Pan-Africanism and Negritude. Located in the 5th arrondissement, it is in the Latin Quarter, not far from the Sorbonne University. Inside, the space is a temple of books, housing a large selection of work from Black diaspora authors. Founder Alioune Diop died in 1980 and his wife, Christiane Yandé, took over. Today, professor and writer Romuald Fonkoua runs *Presence Africaine*.

Hidden Histories/Unwritten Stories

Black lives have long been hidden in plain sight in Paris. There are some markers celebrating their contributions, but the stories behind them are seldom told. One example is the street named after Chevalier de Saint-Georges in central Paris. Rue du Chevalier de Saint-Georges is located in the 1st arrondissement. De Saint-Georges was an accomplished 18th-century classical composer and champion fencer. He was born in Guadeloupe in 1745 to Georges de Bologne Saint-Georges, a married white French planter, and Anne (also called Nanon), an enslaved African of Senegalese origin owned

24 The Académie Française oversees the French language in France.

by his wife. When he was a young soldier he became colonel of the Legion of Saint-Georges, an all-Black regiment in Europe fighting for the Republic during the French Revolution. Although he was a brave soldier and an example of the country's brightest and best, he faced racism from a young age and witnessed the horrors of enslavement. But his skills spoke for themselves, earning him a special place in French history. However, this was largely ignored until December 2001, when he finally received an official tribute.

At that time, Paris counselor George-Pau Langevin (originally from Guadeloupe) and Paris mayor Bertrand Delanoë changed the name of Rue Richepanse to Chevalier de Saint-Georges. The original street name had been controversial as it honored Antoine Richepanse, a former governor of Guadeloupe under Napoleon Bonaparte who was in charge of the restoration of the enslavement system in Martinique and other islands in 1802. The French Revolution and Black revolts had resulted in the first attempt to abolish enslavement in 1794. As Dominique Taffin, from the Foundation for the Remembrance of Slavery, explained:

> Napoleon wanted to extend the French colonial empire to control the Caribbean. To colonize the huge land of Louisiana in North America, he needed workers so he restarted the slave trade. It was a colonial strategy. (Phalnikar 2021)

France permanently abolished enslavement on the mainland and in the colonies in 1848. Opponents of Richepanse had wanted to change the street name for many years, sending petitions and several letters to the city hall before Langevin and city officials stepped in. The process of changing a street name requires the approval of the mayor, who studies the case with advisers. Delanoë supported the renaming, calling the Rue de Richepanse "a permanent insult to the Afro-Caribbean population of Paris" (Henley 2002). The street was finally renamed in February 2002, after a yearlong battle between Delanoë and the right-wing mayors of the 1st and 8th arrondissements, Jean-François Legaret and François Lebel. Today, the story of Chevalier Saint-Georges reaches beyond his homeland. Disney's Searchlight Pictures has announced that a new film, titled *Chevalier*, will be released in 2023. And although Disney's involvement can be read critically, depicting Chevalier's life will bring light to another hidden Black story.

Figure 6.4: The Toussaint Louverture Garden. Photograph: Epée Hervé Dingong, 2022

Other unwritten histories include that of François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, the famous Haitian general and abolitionist and the most prominent leader of the Haitian Revolution. In 2021, a small garden was named after him in the former Square des Amandiers in the 20th arrondissement. The decision to rename the park was voted on by the Paris city council in April 2021 after a similar measure was adopted by the district council. In the renaming ceremony, city hall called Louverture "a great abolitionist and emancipatory figure."[25] However, even though Louverture is one of France's most prominent Black figures and an inscription honoring him was engraved on a wall in the Panthéon in 2009, he is rarely found in the French school curriculum. Writer Lauren Collins explains that, while Louverture and the story of his country's revolution is taught in high schools in some of France's overseas territories, in metropolitan vocational high schools, whose students are more likely to come from working-class and immigrant families, the recently updated curriculum acknowledges the Haitian Revolution as a "singular extension" of the American and French Revolutions and not as the starting point of the global process to abolish enslavement (Collins 2020). Since it is not part of the general high-school curriculum, the typical French student completes their high-school education without hearing much about the revolution or its heroes. This is despite the fact that Louverture was hailed

25 Author's translation of: "Grande figure abolitionniste et émancipatrice," "Le jardin Toussaint Louverture inauguré dans le quartier des Amandiers (20ème arrondissement)," Paris Lights Up, May 10, 2021 (https://parislightsup.com/2021/05/10/le-jardin-toussaint-louverture-inaugure-dans-le-quartier-des-amandiers-20eme-arrondissement/)

as "the Black Spartacus" who embodied the ideals of the French Revolution (ibid.). He was also a hero of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, while activist Marcus Garvey asserted that his "brilliancy as a soldier and statesman outshone that of a Cromwell, Napoleon, and Washington" (Hill and Bair 1987). Aimé Césaire believed that Haiti was the place where "negritude stood up for the first time and proclaimed its faith in its humanity" (Césaire 1970), which in turn inspired the modern anticolonial movement all over the world. In spite of all of this, France has not seen him and his fight as indispensable elements of its national narrative but rather as a minor part of it (Collins 2020).

At present, the Fondation pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage (Foundation for the Memory of Slavery), which was created in 2016, is pushing French authorities to correct these oversights. In a September 2020 report, it asserted that not all French children learn the same history. The report was issued just before the 20th anniversary of the Taubira law, which was marked by national ceremonies. The 2001 law was spearheaded by French deputy Christiane Taubira (born in French Guiana) and designated enslavement as a crime against humanity. It also mandated that school curricula accord these subjects "the substantial place that they merit" (Collins 2020). Following the passage of the law, France updated and revised its textbooks, although, in 2005, the French legislature mandated that schools emphasize the "positive role" of colonialism. However, the center-right president Jacques Chirac eventually gave in to the longstanding demands of campaigners and established a national day to commemorate the end of enslavement after riots in the banlieues (Bennhold 2006). The work to create a day of commemoration had been a long and arduous struggle; it had received widespread public attention in May 1998, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of enslavement and eight years before Chirac's declaration, when more than 40,000 Caribbean, Guyanese, Réunionese, and metropolitan women and men took part in a silent march in tribute to the victims of colonial enslavement. This pulled back the curtain on a taboo subject and led to the passing of the Taubira law. In May 2006, Chirac finally stated that tributes would be paid to abolitionists, including Louverture.

Meanwhile, another 'unknown' Parisian, political pioneer Severiano de Heredia (the first and only Black mayor of Paris, elected in 1879), received recognition when a street was named after him in October 2015. Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo presided over the ceremony for the unveiling of Rue Severiano de Heredia, a new street in the 17th arrondissement. The inauguration paid

tribute to Heredia, who was born in Havana, Cuba, as a free Black man in 1836. Heredia came to Paris in 1845 after being adopted by a French woman, Madeleine Godefroy, who was married to his godfather, Don Ignacio Heredia y Campuzano-Polanco. An excellent student, he became a poet and a literary critic, winning the Grand Prize of Honor at the well-known and prestigious Louis-le-Grand high school. In 1870, he officially became a French citizen and, with a growing interest in politics, skillfully and confidently threw himself into the field.

Heredia was the defender of many causes, such as universal education and the separation of church and state. In 1873, he was elected to the municipal council of Paris as a representative for the 17th arrondissement and spent six years in the position before he was elected president. This position is equivalent to a mayorship today, de facto making him the mayor of Paris from 1879 to 1880. Heredia, however, was met with racism from French conservatives and others. One newspaper referred to him as "The Negro of the Elysée" while others called him the "chocolate minister" or worse (Atisu 2019). Heredia died of meningitis in his Paris home on February 9, 1901.

Like previous Black heroes, Heredia was never mentioned in French history books at any level – not at elementary, high school, or university. It took until the 2015 tribute for the mayor of Paris to acknowledge that Heredia had been sidelined. She said that, with the street naming, the city was correcting this forgotten history and "guilty oversight" (Triay 2015). As this and other examples throughout this chapter have shown, the absence of remembrance of Black contributions to France denies the true nature of the relationship between the country and its former colonies or Caribbean *départements*. Instead of extending its motto of *Liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, to Black citizens, it contests their national identity, forcing them into invisibility at the periphery of French life.

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