



Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light

Tyler Stovall

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Paris Noir fills a grievous gap in the fascinating history of American expatriates who chose to live in Paris in the twentieth century. Alongside Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and Henry Miller was an avant-garde and tightly knit community of African Americans who found in Paris the artistic, racial, and emotional freedom denied them back home. The writers James Baldwin and Richard Wright; the jazz musicians Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Sidney Bechet; and the artists Henry Ossawa Tanner, Lois Mailou Jones, and Jean-Michel Basquiat are among the score of exiles for whom Paris symbolized a color-blind society. Unlike their white compatriots, African Americans in Paris rejected not only American society, but also their victimized status in the U.S. And while black and white Americans inhabited different worlds even in Paris, they found meeting grounds in such places as Bricktop's jazzy nightclub, where the flamboyant owner taught Cole Porter to dance the Charleston. As the historian John Merriman proclaimed, "With skill and passion, Stovall brings this vibrant community to life."

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