

WILL BLACK COLLEGES RECOVER FROM HURRICANE KATRINA?

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PARIS A New Crop of Black Americans Calls the French Capital Home

LONDON The Modern Vision of Architect David Adjaye

THE DIASPORA

Coming To America

Can Black Immigrants and African Americans Get Along?

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Nunu Kidane of Oakland, Ca., came to the U.S. from Eritrea

joined the stream in 1990. She says Black Americans continue to come because they are drawn by the same psychological freedom their predecessors sought and because of the city's glamour.

It's not easy to come and stay, says Browne, 48, explaining that when she moved, the job market in France was tight in general and even tighter for expatriates because the government maintains a system of preference for the French.

"Entrepreneurship is key," she says. "If you come, you've got to be clever enough to make your way." Browne did just that and, more than a decade ago, created Walking the Spirit Tours.

THE WRITING LIFE

Sixteen years ago, Jake Lamar left *Time* magazine and published his first book, *Bourgeois Blues* (1991), a memoir of life with his father growing up in the Bronx. Soon after, he won a grant and went to Paris, intending to stay for a year. He never left.

Unlike Baldwin, Lamar never felt he had to come to Paris to escape American racism. He never felt exiled. France has its own racial problems, says Lamar, but "there's an air of artistic freedom here."

The splendor of the city — its cafés, its ethnic diversity and its architecture — captivated him. He was similarly captivated by the European singer/actress Dorli, whom he married in 1999. They, too, live on the Montmartre hilltop, slightly up from the area where earlier Black expats settled. His neighborhood was once home to Pablo Picasso, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Vincent Van Gogh. It is also near the colorful African/Arab neighborhood Barbès, which is sometimes called Little Africa.

The community inspires Lamar, who writes thrillers, and has even made its way into his latest work, *Rendezvous Eighteenth*, published in 2003.

Though he remains challenged by the intricacies of the language, Lamar's transition to Paris was eased by the brotherhood of



Author Jake Lamar went to Paris intending to stay for a year. That was almost 16 years ago. In 1999, he married a French woman.

Black men he met when he first came to the city. Among them was the beat poet Ted Joans, who became his mentor.

Lamar, a Harvard University graduate, got his first Paris inspirations when he was 12, reading Baldwin and Wright. Now he's being favorably compared to such storied figures.

His life has paralleled that of Chester Himes, the edgy but gifted writer who came to Paris during the World War II era. Himes, the author of *A Rage in Harlem*, won a foundation grant to Paris and soon found a fraternity among Black writers including Wright and Ollie Harrington. Both Himes and Lamar found love in Paris, wrote in the mystery genre and explore race issues in their writing.

Lamar is hoping his work will bring future generations to Paris, just as his literary ancestors awakened him to the idea.

"There is no greater compliment for me as a writer than learning that I've inspired, comforted or provoked new interests and insights in young Black readers. I've had African American students who had read *Rendezvous Eighteenth* and felt inspired to travel more, discover more about the world and themselves."

Lamar has discovered that the pace of Paris suits him. He enjoys sleeping late, strolling to his favorite café, Cepage Montmartrois, where he reads over his manuscripts with a beer, or walking with his wife through a small park near the Sacre-Coeur.

Writers come to Paris, he says, because the city reveres their craft. "Everybody from the baker to the literary critic respects people who write books," he says. "That is part of the magic of Paris."

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel came for love. For her, Paris was never in her immediate plans. Sure, as a little girl on the South Side of Chicago she was enraptured when her globe-trotting piano teacher shared stories of her European adventures. Later, reading books by Baldwin and Wright, and learning about the acceptance the authors found in Paris, whetted her appetite. It would be nice to vacation there, she thought. But she never imagined she'd live in Paris.

Then, she married a Frenchman, a White man originally from Lyon. After 10 years of living in the States, Davenport-Moncel's husband, Philippe, grew homesick. A few years ago, he found a job in Paris, uprooted the Loyola University graduate and moved their two young daughters — Chloe and Jillian, now 8 and 3, respectively — a dog, a cat and her home-based business, across the Atlantic.

Davenport-Moncel was not thrilled. She had just started MotionTemps, which offers public relations and other services to small business owners, and did not speak French. Now they've been here for three years and Davenport-Moncel has just celebrated her 37th birthday.

The family lives in Courbevoie, a neat little suburb, just west of Paris, where their neighbors hail from Algeria, Morocco, Canada, Germany, Bosnia, Great Britain, Senegal and Mali.

Davenport-Moncel had met her in-laws on previous visits to Paris, but barriers of race and language still existed. Despite this, they were very understanding, staying with her for a week when she first arrived to help with the adjustment. After they left, because she did not speak French and with her husband away everyday at work, she felt scared and isolated.

Her daughter Chloe, who's bilingual, had to translate. Davenport-Moncel felt paralyzed. For about three months, she did not answer the phone. She never even left the apartment.

Slowly she got over the bumps. She took a taxi, shopped for groceries, went to the pediatrician. Then she threw herself into her business. Her enterprise flourished as she lives close to La Defense, a commercial corridor where French, British and American companies use her services.

Davenport-Moncel had vacationed in Paris, but living there as



Carolyn Davenport-Moncel moved to Paris three years ago, after her French husband, Philippe Moncel, grew homesick. Although she struggles with the language, their daughters are bilingual.

a mother with family and business responsibilities "makes the experience different from living or visiting here in your uninhibited 20s," she says. "You just don't have the same freedom to enjoy the city." But Courbevoie is like a village, and she embraces the slower pace.

Davenport-Moncel, who now speaks conversational French, is beginning to take formal language classes. She loved culture and language classes when she was young, so she's particularly pleased that her daughters are growing up bilingual, although the family still only speaks English at home.

Davenport-Moncel says her biggest hurdle was getting over herself. "I couldn't stay afraid forever," she says of coming to Paris.

"Overnight I started doing all the things I had been afraid to do. Now I can get around the city better than my husband."



For swankier affairs, there is The Minority Caucus of Democrats Abroad-France. The Paris group was founded about three decades ago, and, after a short dormant period, was revitalized in 1992. Gatherings are held primarily in two members' homes. Events have periodically been hosted at the American embassy.

everyday by telephone. Some are her clients. She began her Paris bonding even before she moved. Her husband went online and found Sisters, a decade-old organization of Black women in Paris.

Davenport-Moncel is not an official member, but she occasionally attends meetings, which are held about once a month. Sisters also holds parties on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Juneteenth, and creates programs during Black History Month. There was once a celebration of Bessie Coleman, the first Black female aviator.

A similar group for men, called Brothers, meets monthly over drinks for professional networking and to share cultural tidbits.

These sessions offer camaraderie, but they also pass on practical know-how, such as the locations of Black cultural events and hair salons, where you can go to listen to Black music, and where to buy foods like sweet potatoes, corn meal and black-eyed peas.

The commingling helps the expatriates create community, says Browne, the tour company owner, who has attended Sisters meetings, which she describes as noisy and exuberant. The women first met in homes, but the group has grown, and today gathers in restaurants.

TO GET USED TO HER NEW WORLD MITCHELL DID "AT LEAST ONE SCARY THING A WEEK" — A DOCTOR'S VISIT, A RESEARCH TRIP, A POST OFFICE STOP.

PARIS NOIRE

For the thousand or so Blacks who live in Paris, informal soirees, gospel concerts, art exhibits, theater and since the 1960s, when Baldwin and Wright crawled this city, a growing web of social support helps newcomers learn the city: the good and the bad.

For while France is a haven, it is not prejudice-free.

Three weeks of fiery protests in November revealed deeply rooted frustration among North African and Arab immigrants in France's suburbs who are hammered by poverty, intolerance and police intimidation.

Oprah Winfrey may have been snubbed at Hermes, but decades of discrimination in housing and jobs have been hurled toward people of color from France's former colonies, such as Algeria and Senegal. Arabs and North African immigrants bear the brunt of the bias.

Despite the recent flare-ups, Black Americans try to build solidarity with other immigrants of color while seeking connections with each other.

Davenport-Moncel talks with her Black American friends in Paris

Other gatherings are more informal. If it's Sunday, it must be time to head to the first-floor apartment of Patricia Laplante-Collins. Originally from Atlanta, Laplante-Collins hosts Sunday evening soirees, crammed with conversation on literature, the arts, architecture and philosophy. On the welcome table, international foods are offered, including American, French, Italian and Thai.

On Fridays and Saturdays, African Americans jam at Chez Haynes, the soul food sanctuary of Paris. Established in 1949, Chez Haynes was the first soul food restaurant in this city. The late founder Leroy Haynes placed his restaurant in Black Montmartre, a section of this neighborhood where Black jazzmen and businesses made their home beginning in the 1920s. Chez Haynes's honey-chicken and barbecue and jam sessions make it a popular destination for tourists and locals alike.

"It's not quite home," says Mitchell of Paris, but "it's close enough to feed your spirit."

Ervin Dyer covers religion and race issues at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. He traveled to Paris in September 2005.