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APPEL À CONTRIBUTIONS : FREDERICK DOUGLASS ACROSS AND AGAINST TIMES, PLACES, AND DISCIPLINES

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Frederick Douglass across and against Times, Places, and Disciplines

11-13 octobre 2018, Paris

Appel à contributions

In an article entitled "Frederick Douglass, Refugee," published in the *Atlantic* in February 2017, historian David Blight argued that "[o]ne place to begin to understand our long history with the controversies over immigration is with Douglass." In his 2015 *The Strangers Book: The Human of African American Literature*, American Literature scholar Lloyd Pratt insisted on Douglass's engagement with the figure of the stranger, his inhabitation of the stranger persona as a tool to build up a polis and found a demos on what Pratt calls "stranger-with-ness." This conference, organized on the occasion of the bicentennial of Douglass's birth, proposes to reconsider Douglass's practice and "art of estrangement" (Giles) broadly understood as spatial and temporal displacement and philosophical, epistemological and disciplinary decentering.

2018 will mark the bicentennial of Frederick Douglass's birth. The wide array of events and activities already planned testifies to Douglass's relevance to present debates in the United States and other countries. Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives (FDI)'s "One Million Abolitionists" plans to print one million copies of the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave for distribution in schools as well as the creation of projects addressing present social justice issues. In 2018, the National Park Service (NPS) will organize public and educational programs at the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (NHS) in Washington, D.C. Likewise, the bicentennial conference that will be held in Paris in 2018 will be an opportunity to reexamine the figure of Frederick Douglass across times, places, and disciplines. It encourages contributions that read Douglass's writings—not his serial autobiographies and speeches only, but also his antebellum journalism, his letters, his (rare) poetry and his one foray into fiction—as well as his life beyond the familiar chronological and geographical boundaries. It thereby hopes to contribute to revisiting the heuristic coordinates of Douglass's scholarship.

The purpose of this conference, however, is not to commemorate Douglass as a solitary, exceptional figure, but rather to consider him in relation to his contemporaries and to his world, as one voice, powerful though it was, among others. Douglass collaborated with and opposed

other black and white intellectuals, activists, artists and politicians. He was a man involved in the conflicts and ruptures of his time, in the United States and beyond. His authority and centrality also must be re-examined.

Panels or individual papers may address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

• Reading Douglass across and against times

- Reading Douglass reading his time as a “witness and participant” but also as a promoter of anachrony used as a political tool to “repeat history in order to deform it” (Castronovo).
- Reading Douglass’s writings “against 1865,” against the “before-after narrative of emancipation” (Hager and Marrs), in the hope of complexifying our interpretation of Douglass’s use of the genre of the slave narrative;
- Reading Douglass’s “lives” beyond the chronology of Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Levine), in particular his ambivalent career as a diplomat (Bourhis-Mariotti), a Republican appointee, and an activist in the 1890s.
- Douglass and radical democracy and activism: considering Douglass’s role in a larger history of abolitionism understood as “a radical, interracial movement, one which addressed the entrenched problems of exploitation and disenfranchisement in a liberal democracy and anticipated debates over race, labor and empire” (Sinha).
- Douglass’s engagement with an ecological antislavery logics (Ellis).
- Re-reading Douglass’s reception. Reading Douglass within an enlarged canon of African American writing (White & Drexler; Hager) in conjunction with other North American slave narratives and early African American fiction, history and journalism (William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs etc.). How does this enlarged canon affect Douglass’s critical reception and his status today as the greatest black pre-Civil war author?
- Reading Douglass today so as to open new perspectives on the interplay between history, memory and activism at play in Douglass’s and our times.
- Douglass and the discourse of liberation, human rights and humanitarianism; Douglass’s practice of a stranger humanism based on mutually acknowledged and always evolving differences (Pratt).
- Reconsidering Douglass and public history: What aspects of present debates are illuminated by Douglass’s words (Davis)? Why teach Douglass today?

• Reading Douglass across and against spaces

- Changing the maps and geographical coordinates that have shaped our understanding of Douglass. Using Martha Schoolman’s “abolitionist geographies,” for example, which include both the local and the circum-atlantic, invites us to explore imaginative routes for Douglass’s legacy, from Canada to Rome and London to Haiti and Liberia, via the more expected yet still understudied Afro-Caribbean geopolitical spaces (Nwankwo).
- Reexamining issues of mobility and displacement in Douglass’s life; Douglass as an American and international figure; Douglass and transnationalism; Douglass and the Americas (Hooker); Douglass and France (how The North Star covered the 1848 Revolution, for example [Fagan, Alimi-Levy]); Douglass and the diasporic self.
- Translating Douglass across languages and spaces
- Investigating the different spaces of Douglass’s life and work; Douglass’s “public body” (Fanuzzi); Douglass’s “feminine space” (Fought).
- Decentering our reading of Douglass may lead us to complicate the genealogy of his writing beyond the racial divide and find other significant intertextualities—not only the “Founding Fathers,” the New England Transcendentalists, his contemporaries Hawthorne and Melville (Otter and Levine) and Harriet Beecher Stowe, but also his Black Atlantic peers (Giles) and a broader intellectual tradition from the political thought of John Stuart Mill to the transatlantic print culture of the time.

• Reading Douglass across and against disciplines

Douglass wrote at a moment when “modern academic fields were becoming increasingly defined” but his writing cut across disciplinary boundaries (Lee). To be considered:

- Douglass’s use of fiction or of the tools of fiction in his journalism, in his speeches;
- Douglass’s “rhetorical legacy” (John R. Kaufman-McKivigan);
- Douglass’s role as an editor (Meer)
- Douglass and book history: questioning the vision of Douglass and his African-American peers as autonomous author-artisans in the sphere of print, free of white abolitionist control in the pre-Civil War period (Roy)
- Douglass’s philosophy or philosophies (Lee);
- Douglass’s “visual affirmations” of himself (Wexler) as well as his celebration of photography “as a great democratic art” (Stauffer, Trodd, & Bernier); Douglass as a celebrity; Douglass and the media.

We plan to organize activities before and after the conference in relation to community-based teaching, performances and public readings.

Deadline for all submissions: January 31, 2018.

Proposals (500 words in English or French and a short bio) to be sent to:

DouglassParis2018@gmail.com

(We welcome papers from graduate and doctoral students.)

Proposals will be reviewed by the **Conference Committee**:

Claire Bourhis-Mariotti, Université Paris 8

Agnès Derail, ENS

Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Claire Parfait, Université Paris 13

Hélène Quanquin, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, Université Paris Diderot

Cécile Roudeau, Université Paris Diderot

Michaël Roy, Université Paris-Nanterre

Keynote speakers (confirmed): Leigh Fought (Le Moyne College), Lloyd Pratt (University of Oxford), Michaël Roy (Université Paris Nanterre).

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