

French connection

Festival Albertine returns to spark conversations on political and cultural issues in France and the U.S.

AT THE THIRD annual Festival Albertine, two tried-and-true red, white and blues—France and the United States—come together for five days of literature, politics and discussions on current issues affecting both countries. The fest, hosted by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, is held at the embassy-run bookstore Albertine, and is free and open to the public.

Journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2015 MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant recipient and author of the acclaimed *Between the World and Me*, serves as curator for this year’s event, which features 28 American and French scholars, writers and artists who touch upon themes of race, culture and identity. Coates recently spent a year in Paris, and Bénédicte de Montlaur, cultural counselor of the French Embassy and the festival’s organizer, felt he’d be the perfect bridge between the two cultures.

“Both in France and in America, these questions of racism and identity have been prominent,” says De Montlaur. “They present themselves in different ways because they have very different historical roots—in France it’s rooted in colonialism and immigration, and here it’s rooted in



Coates

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their projects and any difficulties they’ve faced in trying to create their work, including these highlights: On Wednesday 2, Coates moderates a panel discussion about the “post-racial” America some thought would be ushered in with the election of our first black president, the representation of minorities in politics and whether France could someday have a

slavery. But I think that the arts can address those questions in a very powerful way in both countries.”

Over seven events, panelists will discuss their experiences as artists,

leader of color. Thursday 3’s event—with *The Wire* and *Treme* producer David Simon, graphic novelists Kelly Sue DeConnick and Catherine Meurisse, and spoken word artist D’ de Kabal—focuses on what propels television, comic books and slam poetry from pedestrian art to a higher realm. And the topic on Friday 4 centers on diversity in cinema. Segments on black authors, literature’s role in political activism, and race and representation in contemporary art and ballet round out the weekend’s lineup.

“These issues have been addressed a lot through journalism and political debate,” says De Montlaur, “but I really hope the public will see how the arts can be used as a vehicle to address these difficult questions and to transcend differences.”

Even if you can’t attend, you can still join the action. Each event will be livestreamed at livestream.com/frenchembassy and remains available to view. ■ **Dorkys Ramos**
→ Festival Albertine is Wed 2–Sun 6 at the bookstore Albertine (albertine.com). Free.

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