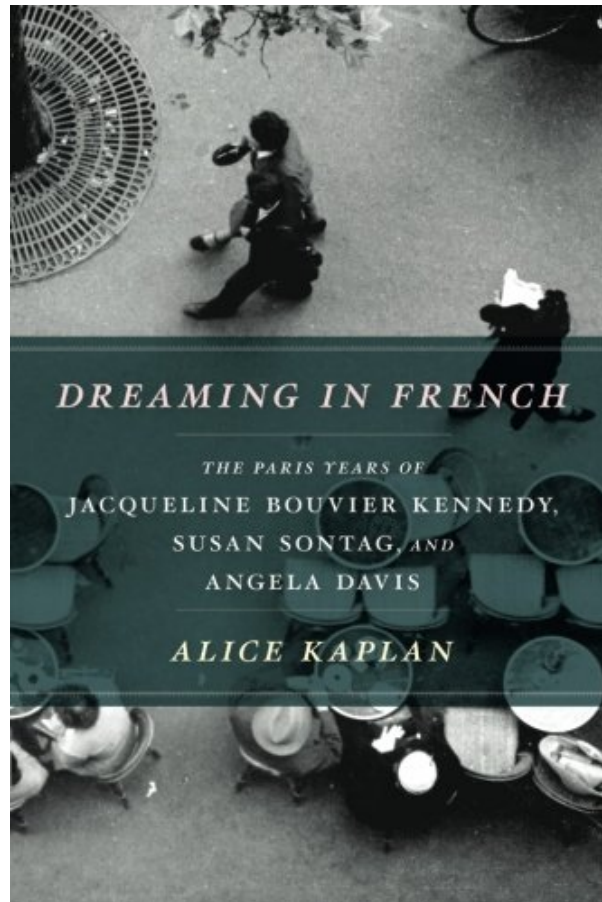
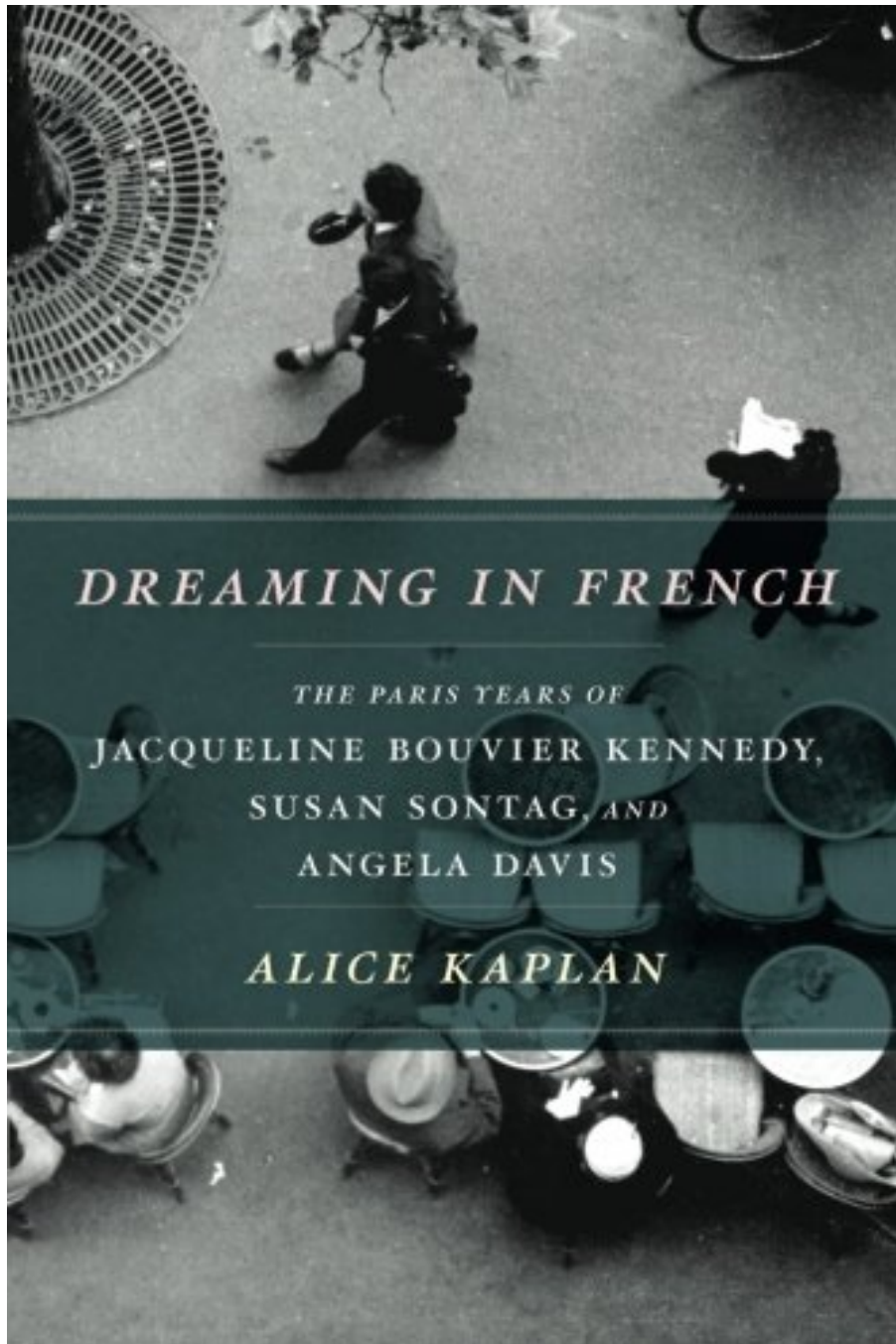


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### From Booklist

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### Review

"Alice Kaplan's superbly perceptive *Dreaming in French* makes a prism out of those visits; the white light of expectation goes in, and a myriad of astonishing colors comes out." (Laura Miller, *Salon*) "Alice Kaplan achieves the improbable in her new book *Dreaming in French*, which weaves together a fascinating triple-portrait of three different and unrelated characters." (San Francisco Chronicle)"

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## DREAMING IN FRENCH BY ALICE KAPLAN PDF

A year in Paris . . . since World War II, countless American students have been lured by that vision—and been transformed by their sojourn in the City of Light. *Dreaming in French* tells three stories of that experience, and how it changed the lives of three extraordinary American women.

All three women would go on to become icons, key figures in American cultural, intellectual, and political life, but when they embarked for France, they were young, little-known, uncertain about their future, and drawn to the culture, sophistication, and drama that only Paris could offer. Yet their backgrounds and their dreams couldn't have been more different. Jacqueline Bouvier was a twenty-year-old debutante, a Catholic girl from a wealthy East Coast family. Susan Sontag was twenty-four, a precocious Jewish intellectual from a North Hollywood family of modest means, and Paris was a refuge from motherhood, a failing marriage, and graduate work in philosophy at Oxford. Angela Davis, a French major at Brandeis from a prominent African American family in Birmingham, Alabama, found herself the only black student in her year abroad program—in a summer when all the news from Birmingham was of unprecedented racial violence.

Kaplan takes readers into the lives, hopes, and ambitions of these young women, tracing their paths to Paris and tracking the discoveries, intellectual adventures, friendships, and loves that they found there. For all three women, France was far from a passing fancy; rather, Kaplan shows, the year abroad continued to influence them, a significant part of their intellectual and cultural makeup, for the rest of their lives. Jackie Kennedy carried her love of France to the White House and to her later career as a book editor, bringing her cultural and linguistic fluency to everything from art and diplomacy to fashion and historic restoration—to the extent that many, including Jackie herself, worried that she might seem “too French.” Sontag found in France a model for the life of the mind that she was determined to lead; the intellectual world she observed from afar during that first year in Paris inspired her most important work and remained a key influence—to be grappled with, explored, and transcended—the rest of her life. Davis, meanwhile, found that her Parisian vantage strengthened her sense of political exile from racism at home and brought a sense of solidarity with Algerian independence. For her, Paris was a city of political commitment, activism, and militancy, qualities that would deeply inform her own revolutionary agenda and soon make her a hero to the French writers she had once studied.

Kaplan, whose own junior year abroad played a prominent role in her classic memoir, *French Lessons*, spins these three quite different stories into one evocative biography, brimming with the ferment and yearnings of youth and shot through with the knowledge of how a single year—and a magical city—can change a whole life. No one who has ever dreamed of Paris should miss it.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

44 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

Read this book!

By A Customer

I read this book practically straight through from cover to cover. I don't mean it was light reading -- it is a scholarly work that clearly required an unbelievable amount of research. One thing that struck me was that the work of a heavyweight intellectual such as Kaplan is at the same time both scholarly and so accessible and engrossing. You don't need to be a historian or literary expert to understand her writing. I've seen this in her other books as well -- Kaplan has a gift of turning archival material into a page turner. So, I recommend it for its prose and tone. As for its subject matter: what amazingly different (yet familiar to all of us who spent student years there) experiences of Paris for the three women who went on to become American cultural icons. Their backgrounds were different, their cultural moments were different, and each one had her own Paris. Kaplan unearths details and artifacts for our analysis -- small moments in their Parisian lives -- that she pieces together into intimate portraits that are both meaningful and complex. At the same time, these three portraits illuminate Paris, gritty and magical, and invite the reader to experience it alongside.

26 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Personal Remembrances through the Eyes of Three Famous Women

By Jimmie Benbrook

Being something of an amateur Francophile, I read this book on a whim, but then was pleasantly surprised to find it full of some unexpected personal historical references. The common thread for three otherwise diverse personalities, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Susan Sontag, and Angela Davis, is the fact that they all spent around a year studying abroad in France during the formative years of their early adulthood. In 1962-63, I also spent year and a half of my early adulthood in France, not as a student, but as an enlisted soldier in the United States Army. Granted, I was not immersed in the daily study of the French language and culture as these amazing women were, but I was definitely influenced by French society through my somewhat limited contact. Alice Kaplan, the author, explains my circumstances quite clearly: "For some Americans, the early 1960s was an era of idealism and service, Vietnam a cloud on the horizon." I took President Kennedy's "Ask not what your country..." speech literally as a high school senior and enlisted in the Army in 1961, two weeks after graduating high school.

Each of this book's three subjects had their own specific reasons for studying in France, and of the three, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy was the only one with a definitive French ancestry. She studied there during the 1949-50 school year when I was in elementary school, was a debutante, and moved among the upper crust of post-war French society. Although her schooling in France had nothing to do with my personal history, her subsequent years as First Lady certainly did. She was a friend and admirer of Charles de Gaulle who ordered all American troops out of France when I was stationed there (my unit subsequently transferred to Germany). I didn't realize how much Jackie loved the French culture until I read this book and now wonder how much she would still be admired these days in the current American political climate.

I found the motives of Susan Sontag to be the most difficult of the three to understand and accept. As a prodigy she had attended several major universities in the United States (including UCLA, my alma mater) before studying in France in the late 50s. She was in her early twenties at the time, married, and had a child whom she basically abandoned to study in Paris, and her infatuation with an intense lesbian love affair dominated all else.

Angela Davis was teaching at UCLA when I was a student there, but my interests were in studying, not in following her concurrent controversies. I can, however, attest to the evils of the segregated South in 1961 while I was attending Signal School at Fort Gordon, near Augusta, Georgia. Upon arriving at the Augusta Airport from Los Angeles, I saw the "Whites Only" and "Colored Only" signs on the airport water fountains and bathrooms, quite a shock, even then, for a young man born and raised in California. A few weeks later a group of us student soldiers went to downtown Augusta on a weekend pass. One of the members of our small group was a black kid from Chicago, and someone suggested we go into a diner for a bite to eat; he refused, saying he was not allowed to go in there. This same kid who we had meals with in the mess hall every day was not allowed to eat with us outside the post. It still amazes me to this day that this existed in my own country.

20 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Essential study abroad reading

By MeAndYou

As a (fairly) young person, I had only received notions of the three women whose terms in Paris make up the focus of this book. I came to it not for them but because, as someone who had studied abroad, I was interested in reading stories of this rite of passage. This book is wonderfully written, and Kaplan is so comfortably acquainted with France that you feel very much in good hands. The portraits of Jacque, Sontag and Angela Davis are intriguing and surprising--it's enjoyable to meet these women before the things that made them famous. But the ultimate subject of this book is what happens when you go away; how leaving home for a strange place helps clarify or complicate your identity. For these women, that place was Paris--but for you or me, it could be anywhere, and the ideas in *Dreaming in French* would translate.

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