

Studying abroad in Paris, France fulfilled a life-long dream for me to live in Paris and immerse myself in France's language and culture. This experience taught me an immeasurable variety of lessons about differences between languages, cultures, nations, societies, and individuals. One of the most unexpected lessons I learned from my semester abroad, however, was the extent to which people of the same races can learn from and teach each other. The majority of French citizens are white, but they have a very different history in terms of ethnic relations and cultural evolution than my white ancestors do, and they share a "white culture," if you will, that is very different from my own or even that of most white American citizens. They also have a very different conception than I do of white relations with racial minorities largely due to France's colonial history, a tension manifested in the country's current immigration debate. Despite the fact that French people and I share the same race, these other, less blatant differences fostered a wealth of cultural exchanges and opportunities for me to learn about race and ethnic relations to the same extent as a white student who studies in a majority non-white culture. Every student has his or her personal reasons for why, when, and where he or she chooses to study abroad, and every experience has its own merits. Just as my time in France taught me how one similarity between people can often reveal some of the greatest differences between them, as much as students' study abroad experiences compare to each other, each consists of its own unique revelations, challenges, and memories. And that, to me, is one of the greatest beauties of studying abroad regardless of one's racial or ethnic background.