Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)

French psychiatrist and revolutionary writer, whose writings had profound influence on the radical movements in the 1960s in the United States and Europe. As a political thinker born in Martinique, Fanon's views gained audience in the Caribbean islands along with Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, C.L.R. James, and Eric Williams. Fanon rejected the concept of Négritude - a term first used by Césaire - and stated that persons' status depends on their economical and social position. Fanon believed that violent revolution is the only means of ending colonial repression and cultural trauma in the Third World. "Violence," he argued, "is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."

"I have no wish to be the victim of the Fraud of a black world. My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values.
There is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence.
There are in every part of the world men who search.
I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.
I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introduction invention into existence.
In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself." (Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks, 1952)

Frantz Fanon grew up in Martinique amid descendants of African slaves brought to the Caribbean to work on the island's sugar plantations. He became in his teenage politically active and participated in the guerrilla struggle against the supporters of the pro-Nazi French Vichy government. He served in the Free French forces and volunteered to go to Europe to fight. After the war he studied medicine and psychiatry in Paris and Lyons.

From an 'European intellectual' Fanon gradually transformed to polemic scholar and socialist to revolutionary. Seared as a youth by racism, and influenced by Sartre's existentialism, Fanon analyzed the impact of colonialism and its deforming effects. His first major work, BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS (1952), had a major influence on civil rights, anti-colonial, and black consciousness movements around the world. Fanon argued that white colonialism imposed an existentially false and degrading existence upon its
black victims to the extent that it demanded their conformity to its distorted values. He demonstrates how the problem of race, of color, connects with a whole range of words and images, starting from the symbol of the dark side of the soul. "Is not whiteness in symbols always ascribed in French to Justice, Truth, Virginity?" Fanon examines race prejudices as a philosopher and psychologist although he acknowledges social and economic realities. The tone of the text varies from outrage to cool analysis and its poetic grace has not lost anything from its appeal.

In 1952 Fanon began to practice in a psychiatric ward in Algeria. He married in 1953 a young white Frenchwoman. He was appointed director of the psychiatric department of Blida-Joinville's hospital, where he applied the ideas of François Tosquelles, an innovative practitioner of group therapy. In 1954 the National Liberation Front (FLN) started its open warfare against French rule. After three years he resigned and allied himself with the Algerian liberation movement that sought to throw off French rule. Fanon travelled guerrilla camps from Mali to Sahara, hid terrorist at his home and trained nurses to dress wounds. In 1959 he was severely wounded on the border of Algeria and Morocco. Fanon then worked briefly as an ambassador of the provisional Algerian government to Ghana and edited in Tunisia the magazine *Moudjahid*. During this period he also founded Africa's first psychiatric clinic.

Much of his writing of this period concentrated on the Algerian revolution, including the essays published in *L'AN CINQ, DE LA RÉVOLUTION ALGÉRIENNE* (1959), in which he calls for armed struggle against the French imperialism. Fanon himself did not live long enough to witness the victory of the struggle, Algeria's independence.

Fanon survived several political murder attempts, and also the slaughter in 1957, in which the F.L.N. killed 300 suspected supporters of a rival rebel group. After a 1,200-mile intelligence expedition in 1960, from Mali to the Algerian, he was seriously ill. Finally he was taken of leukemia and died in Washington, DC, on December 12, 1961. In the same year appeared *The Wretched of the Earth*, called by its publisher "the handbook for the black revolution". The work was based on his horrific experiences in Algeria during its war of independence. Using Marxist framework, Fanon explores the class collision and questions of cultural hegemony in the creation and maintenance of a new country's national consciousness. "In guerrilla war the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the places where you are going. Each fighter carries his warring country between his toes." The book became one of the central documents of the black liberation movement. His writings also influenced such anticolonial writers as Kenya's Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Zimbabwe's Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Senegal's Ousmane Sembène. Fanon did not accept the view that the Communist party leads the revolution like Mao,
but he believed that the revolutionary party grows from the struggle. As a
Marxist Fanon argued that postcolonial African nations end in disaster if they
simply replace their white colonial bourgeois leaders with black African
postcolonial boutgeoisie trained by Europeans - oppression remains under
capitalistic class structure. "The national bourgeoisie will be greatly helped on
its way toward decadence by the Western bourgeoisies, who come to it as tourists
avid for the exotic, for big game hunting, and for casinos. The national
bourgeoisie organizes centers of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet
the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the mane of
tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry."

For further reading: Fanon by D. Caute (1970); Frantz Fanon by L.
Gendzler (1973); A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz
Fanon by Richard C. Onwuanibe (1983); Holy Violence by B. Marie
Perinbam (1983); Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression by
Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan (1985); Fanon and the Crisis of European
Man by Lewis R. Gordon (1995); Fanon: A Critical Reader, ed. by
Lewis R. Gordon (1996); Fanon's Dialectic Experience by Ato Sekyi-
Otu (1997); Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms by T. Denae
Sharpley-Whiting (1997); Fanon for Beginners by Deborah Wyrick
(1998); Rethinking Fanon, ed. by Nigel C. Gibson (1999); Frantz
Fanon: A Life by David Macey (2000) - also: Frantz Fanon, Soweto
and American Black Thought by Lou Turner and John Alan; Frantz
Fanon by Renate Zahar; Black Soul White Artifact by Jock
McCulloch; Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution by J. Adele
Jinadu; Frantz Fanon by Emmanuel Hansen; New Theories of
Revolution by Jock Woddis

Selected works:

- PEAU NOIR, MASQUES BLANCS, 1952 - Black Skin, White Masks
- L'AN CINQ DE LA RÉVOLUTION ALGÉRIENNE, 1959 - Studies in
  a Dying Colonialism
- LES DAMNÉS DE LA TERRE, 1961 - The Wretched Earth - Sorron
  yöstä
- POUR LA RÉVOLUTION AFRICAN, 1964 - Toward the African
  Revolution

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