

# The 50th Anniversary of Fanon: Culture, Consciousness and Praxis

(an editorial introduction)

by

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As tradition has it, golden jubilees usually provide perfect occasions to reflect back on historical accomplishments that are recent enough to reminisce and important enough to still matter. The second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks such a reflective moment across the African world for those who find value in the lessons of the past, their contemporaneous applications and the implications of both for the visions of progress, prosperity and peace. The importance of this decade has already been determined by historical forces that are at least five decades old and the constant need to never forget them. Wherever in the African Diaspora one might exist, the significance of the decade of the 1960s reverberates in both the collective memories and the objective realities. As such, our effort in 2011 to eagerly and unapologetically reflect on the legacy of Frantz Fanon is motivated in one sense by the need to appreciate the iconic figures of the past.

Yet, it should also be very clear that remembrance must also be practical. That is, the 'Fiftieth Anniversaries' of the 2010s will be significant because our reflections on the 1960s will unavoidably bring us face-to-face with lessons from historical struggles that can inform future strategies for empowering African people everywhere from the contemporary contradictions that continue to frustrate even the most basic steps towards progress. Certainly, the cleansing of the psychological stains of slavery and colonization remains as arduous a task today as it was then. While the emergence of the modern African state since independence may have fulfilled Hugh Mundell's timeless anthem, "Africa Must Be Free," the full expression of political power is still an elusive goal. And, there can be no doubt, the full economic potential that rests in the land, the resources and the humanity of Africa remains untapped by Africans for Africans. It is in this spirit of veneration *and* struggle at the fifty-year mark following the transition of Frantz Fanon on December 6, 1961 that the *Journal of Pan African Studies* dedicates this special issue to remembering his exceptional life, thought and work.

Surely, the meaningful reflection on Fanon will explore the intersections of his philosophical and theoretical contributions. Fanon was not just a revolutionary. His serious work was inseparable from his philosophical depth. And, his philosophical discipline provided a foundation for his theoretical development that, in turn, shaped his revolutionary work. Accordingly, an objective of this special issue is to offer some new perspectives on Fanon's philosophical and theoretical contributions. LaRose Parris's essay, "Frantz Fanon: Existentialist, Dialectician, and Revolutionary," captures the essence of these intersecting lines with a focus on Fanon's first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. She sets the tone for the project by making the case that the psychoanalytical, dialectical and existentialist foundations in Fanonian thought were essential to his vision of 'Third World' liberation. Then, Guy Martin skillfully inverts the pyramid in "Revisiting Fanon, From Theory to Practice: Democracy and Development in Africa." His essay contextualizes Fanon by interrogating the interpretations of his thought and work and their implications for post-Cold War Africa. Charles Villet solidifies Part I's emphasis on philosophy and theory in "Hegel and Fanon on the Question of Mutual Recognition: A Comparative Analysis." There, Villet argues that Fanon's celebrated observations on mutual recognition in the colonial setting provide an "optimistic moment" for humanity in the contemporary setting.

The essays in Part II of this special edition all reinforce an additional objective of reflecting on Fanonian praxis. They share in common perspectives on the relevance of Fanon's theoretical and practical intersections for the conceptualization of liberation within and beyond the African Diaspora. Anthony Alessandrini's "Fanon Now: Singularity and Solidarity" provides a solid backdrop for our understanding of a Fanonian praxis that is consistent with his own complexities and those that define the African experience. Alessandrini makes the convincing case for the need to simultaneously appreciate Fanon as a Caribbean writer *and* as a symbol of Diasporic solidarity. In "Reading Violence and Postcolonial Decolonization through Fanon: The Case of Jamaica," Maziki Thame utilizes the Fanonian themes of violence and decolonization as lenses for exploring class and race dynamics in Jamaica. In addition to *Black Skins, White Masks*, she looks to *The Wretched on the Earth* for insights into the Jamaican poor's search for recognition in the context, and confines, of the Jamaican state. Neil Howard provides a similar assessment of Fanon's relevance outside of the African Diaporic frame. In "Freedom and Development in Historical Context: A Comparison of Gandhi and Fanon's Approaches to Liberation," Howard argues that we can gain a deeper understanding of liberation by locating the points of convergence between Fanonian and Gandhian thought.

Indeed, no commemoration of Fanonian thought and practice is complete without a consideration of the literary dimensions of his legacy. In fact, Fanon has become a symbol of the strong links that have always existed between literary expression and social movement. The objective of the essays in Part III is to reintroduce Fanon as a part of a literary tradition that was and remains connected to struggle. Andrea Queeley makes this precise case in her piece entitled "Remembering the Wretched: Narratives of Return as a Practice of Freedom."

By positioning the works of writers Toni Morrison and Edwidge Danticat alongside *The Wretched of the Earth*, Queeley illustrates the multidimensional relationship between literature, liberation and spirituality. Paulette Richards, in “Fanon as Reader of African American Folklore,” provides a similar juxtaposition between Fanon and the symbolism in the African American folk hero, Brer Rabbit. She utilizes this as a trope that captures Fanon’s identification with the African American struggle for freedom. Ricky Hill’s review essay, “Meditations on Fanon,” reaffirms the connection by reviewing John Edgar Wideman’s *Fanon: A Novel*. Hill’s review is a befitting culmination that reminds us of Fanon’s tremendous impact on generations of revolutionary thinkers and movements and the meaning of their struggles with the persistence of race.

Finally, the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Fanon’s transition, and with the *Journal of Pan African Studies* serving as instrument for this observance, it is only appropriate that we conclude by exploring the implications of his thought and praxis to the contemporary evolution of Pan-Africanism. Thus, the essay “Untrapping the Soul of Fanon: Culture, Consciousness and the Future of Pan-Africanism” reflects on how Fanon’s philosophical, theoretical and practical example might inform our understanding of the still-unfolding relationship between culture, consciousness and unity.