

AM LOVED LIKE A WHITE MAN. I AM A WHITE MAN. HER LOVE TAKES ME ONTO THE NOBLE ROAD THAT LEADS TO TOTAL REALIZATION . . . I MARRY WHITE CULTURE, WHITE BEAUTY, WHITE WHITENESS. WHEN MY RESTLESS HANDS CARESS THOSE WHITE BREASTS, THEY GRASP WHITE CIVILIZATION AND DIGNITY AND MAKE THEM MINE.

I DO NOT FEEL I SHOULD BE ABANDONING MY PERSONALITY BY MARRYING A EUROPEAN . . .

Partly as preparation for his work as a psychiatrist, partly in order to look more deeply into personal and social questions agitating his mind, Fanon wrote his first book in 1950, when he was 25 years old. It was published in 1952 with the title *Black Skin, White Masks*.

THIS BOOK, IT IS HOPED, WILL BE A MIRROR . . . IN WHICH IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO DISCERN THE BLACK MAN ON THE ROAD TO DISALIENATION.

ALL AROUND ME THE WHITE MAN, ABOVE THE SKY TEARS AT ITS NAVEL, THE EARTH RASPS UNDER MY FEET, AND THERE IS A WHITE SONG, A WHITE

SONG. ALL THIS WHITENESS THAT BURNS ME.

I SIT DOWN AT THE FIRE AND I BECOME AWARE OF MY UNIFORM. I HAD NOT SEEN IT. IT IS INDEED UGLY. I STOP THERE FOR WHO CAN TELL ME WHAT BEAUTY IS?

For any black person who has at any time had delusions about integrating into a dominant white society, this book should provide painful, indispensable reading. In form it is not well written. Fanon wrote it in a sketchy, jumpy style, now tersely aphoristic, now almost pedantically analytical. But the contents are some of the most important ideas dealing with the central despair of the black soul, the fact that black women and black men are constrained to live in a world deliberately constructed to reduce and to sicken us, and that as a consequence there is no such creature as a normal black person. We're all pathological cases, the main differences being between those who can see through the syndromes we call our personal life styles and those who imagine they're doing very fine, thank you. What the book offers us is a complete picture of the integrationist personality stripped of all pretences, with all clothes removed, bare and naked right down into bones and guts.

AS A PSYCHOANALYST, I SHOULD HELP MY PATIENT BECOME CONSCIOUS OF HIS UNCONSCIOUS AND ABANDON HIS ATTEMPTS AT A HALLUCINATORY WHITENING, BUT ALSO TO ACT IN THE DIRECTION OF A CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE. IN OTHER WORDS, THE BLACK MAN SHOULD NO LONGER BE CONFRONTED BY THE DILEMMA, TURN WHITE OR DISAPPEAR; BUT HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE COGNIZANCE OF A POSSIBILITY OF EXISTENCE. IN STILL OTHER WORDS, IF SOCIETY MAKES DIFFICULTIES FOR HIM BECAUSE OF HIS COLOR, IF IN HIS DREAMS I ESTABLISH THE EXPRESSION OF AN UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE TO CHANGE COLOR, MY OBJECTIVE WILL NOT BE THAT OF DISSUADING HIM FROM IT BY ADVISING HIM TO "KEEP HIS PLACE"; ON THE CONTRARY, MY OBJECTIVE, ONCE HIS MOTIVATIONS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL BE TO PUT HIM IN A POSITION TO CHOOSE ACTION (OR PASSIVITY) WITH RESPECT TO THE REAL SOURCE OF THE CONFLICT—THAT IS, TOWARD THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES.

If Fanon was able to write such a book it was not only because he

had the genius and the skill to do it. More important, the man had a quality few of us have and none of use are trained to live by: he was allergic to bullshit.

A heavy part of our slavery is the way we're incapable of facing what we happen to be doing at any particular time, to look plainly into our lives and admit with no exaggerated flourishes what we are spending life's minutes working at. Fact is we're all in such binds we find ourselves taking any hustle just so we can survive. Each of our binds means money, and survival means running where the dollars are. I have my international foundation grant, you have your poverty job, baby sister grooves on her welfare job or is it city planning these days, and we all dig the sweet brothers and sisters selling our black pride and our black rage in various multicolored packages. Understand; it's not what we don't know what it would be best to spend our lifetimes on. But revolutions don't pay salaries, and we're not idealists alias fools. In this world revolutionaries and other fools die young; we, hip mercenary types, survive.

Surviving, yet knowing what we are, and what we could become, we're better off not looking too deeply into the truth about ourselves. We know why we're so dishonest about our useless lives: in some dark part of us where all that's still worthwhile in us has taken refuge, we're ashamed. In a

small way this shame is good. At least we know there's something wrong with our present hustling lives.

But then shame teaches dangerous little tricks. Revolution would be liberating; our slave survival hustles are disgusting. So, running to hide from our own well earned disgust, we've learned this trick that makes it easier to remain hustling slaves: keep the hustle going, but spread thick layers of proud talk over the same old impotence. Talk of black power. Of our femininity, our masculinity. Our culture, our identity. Our revolution. Talk.

This kind of skill Fanon didn't have. He had a way of looking straight through himself and through the world around him and saying directly what he saw. **WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED THE BLACK SOUL IS A WHITE MAN'S ARTIFACT.**

The sickness of the soul Fanon diagnosed in *Black Skin, White Masks* results directly from our having to live in a white racist world. We're alienated, not only in the simple sense that we live according to values alien to our selves, but more profoundly because everything we do in this white world merely pushes us deeper into our slavery.

Characteristically, having diagnosed the sickness, Fanon prescribed a treatment. At that time he was young enough and inexperienced enough to believe the cure

for this disease built into the construction of our external world could, for some of us at least, be found inside our own heads and souls. White civilization surrounds us with traps and keeps us in all kinds of binds. The young Fanon thought we could free ourselves, those of us whose slavery happens to be primarily mental, through the liberating agency of pure mental exercise.

Through thinking we'd free ourselves from the prison of complexes constructed by whites to keep us perpetually frustrated. Our brothers whose oppression was openly physical would of course have to fight physically for their freedom, but for the intellectually alienated thought itself would be enough of a weapon.

I WOULD PERSONALLY SAY THAT FOR A MAN WHOSE ONLY WEAPON IS REASON THERE IS NOTHING MORE NEUROTIC THAN CONTACT WITH UNREASON.

I FELT KNIFE BLADES OPEN WITHIN ME. I RESOLVED TO DEFEND MYSELF. AS A GOOD TACTICIAN, I INTENDED TO RATIONALIZE THE WORLD AND TO SHOW THE WHITE MAN THAT HE WAS MISTAKEN.

There was something of our usual black élitism in this attitude of the young Fanon. He found white racism irritating, but in principle he accepted his own integration into a white world. Having

done that, he wished white racism, the way of life of the white world, would somehow end and leave him, one superior individual mind, free to communicate with other superior individual minds, and to work peacefully to repair other psyches broken in collisions with a racist world. It was an attitude shot through with inconsistencies. He saw white civilization denying him his humanity; he proclaimed his adherence to this same white civilization. He saw the blackness of his being; he thought his destiny was white.



THE MARTINICAN IS A FRENCHMAN, HE WANTS TO REMAIN PART OF THE FRENCH UNION, HE ASKS ONLY ONE THING, HE WANTS THE IDIOTS AND THE EXPLOITERS TO GIVE HIM THE CHANCE TO LIVE LIKE A HUMAN BEING. I CAN IMAGINE MYSELF LOST, SUBMERGED IN A WHITE FLOOD COMPOSED OF MEN LIKE SARTRE OR ARAGON, I SHOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER. BUT I DO NOT FEEL THAT I SHOULD BE ABANDONING MY PERSONALITY BY MARRYING A EUROPEAN, WHO-EVER SHE MIGHT BE; I CAN

TELL YOU THAT I AM MAKING NO 'FOOL'S BARGAINS.'

There were these and other inconsistencies; but not the kind of inconsistencies that spring from bad faith. Fanon not only saw the white destiny marked out for him in this world; he also saw through the inherent absurdity of this destiny. His were the self-contradictions of an active, growing and very powerful mind searching to work its way out of an extremely difficult bind, the same kind of bind that's got us all tied up in our fucking rhetoric. To be black, and to be doomed to spend our lives working in and working for a white racist world.

The intense mental struggle Fanon had to go through in his attempt to cut through the bind peaked in a sort of inner explosion, a breakdown for which he picked himself up with a determination to restructure his own life, and if possible to help restructure the world he had to live in. In 1952 he took an assignment in the French colonial medical system, to work in the hospital of Blida, in Algeria.

The early fifties were depressing years in Algeria. The French had conquered the country more than a century before, in 1830, after a bloody war against the Arabs and the Berbers living there. Since then all types of Europeans had fled failure at home to settle in Algeria where, thanks to white supremacy, mediocre Europeans could get rich and powerful while the Algerians

themselves became, quite simply a mass of poverty-stricken, jobless, landless, powerless, nationless men and women.

Algeria's older political leaders were still passing their time appealing to the so-called conscience of their white oppressors. As for the self-styled white radicals and white revolutionaries of France, as usual they talked gravely about liberating the colonies—but only after they themselves had come to power through the never-never socialist revolution in Western Europe. Meanwhile, café intellectuals entertained themselves with warmed-over existentialist crap, the kind Camus made so popular, about being neither oppressor nor oppressed, and about how it would be bad for the oppressed to use violence against their oppressors because both would lose their existential humanity that way. Among the Algerians themselves dozens of colorful and impotent religious and cultural organizations sprang up trying in vain to assert the identity of a people the French had fractured and were determined to prevent from coming together. The colonial government, along with piecemeal poverty programs and housing projects designed to show the nice, comfortable side of white power, also supported selected cultural-nationalist groups, helping them fill the air with a rainbow variety of confused, impotent, aimless talk.

Then, in 1954, a group of young

Algerians decided to quit talking and act. In November that year, in a coordinated series of bombing and fire attacks, several important French colonial buildings and installations in Algeria were blown up. Algeria's national revolution had begun.

While continuing his work as a doctor, Fanon made contact with the revolutionary underground and started working with it. French repression grew heavier and more widespread. Fanon took in escaping Algerian revolutionaries, treated the wounded and hid wanted men while still officially a member of the French colonial medical establishment.

IF PSYCHIATRY IS THE MEDICAL TECHNIQUE THAT AIMS TO ENABLE MAN NO LONGER TO BE A STRANGER TO HIS ENVIRONMENT, I OWE IT TO MYSELF TO AFFIRM THAT THE ARAB, PERMANENTLY AN ALIEN IN HIS OWN COUNTRY, LIVES IN A STATE OF ABSOLUTE DEPERSONALIZATION.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF ALGERIA? A SYSTEMATIZED DEHUMANIZATION. THE FUNCTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IS TO SET UP INSTITUTIONS TO SERVE MAN'S NEEDS. A SOCIETY THAT DRIVES ITS MEMBERS TO DESPERATE SOLUTIONS IS A NON-VIABLE SOCIETY, A SOCIETY TO BE REPLACED.

and see how little of the environment is in any way controlled by us. In the face of such total powerlessness, such criminal defenselessness, there are still people among us who talk as if it were possible for black people to take control of this white country and its white government. It is not surprising that when these people go into action they find themselves getting screwed by some more white liberal bullshit masquerading as revolutionary strategy. Only babies can refuse to recognize that white so-called radicals also have the same racist attitudes to us as their non-radical brothers. The main difference is that the nonradical whites are in power, and the radical whites see no way of getting in unless we agree to be the dynamite they can use to blow their way in. Our problem is not how to get into imperial power: our problem is how to withdraw from the imperial system and construct a viable system of our own. In the solution of that problem no white people are capable of thinking and planning with those of us who decide to take care of business. What whites can do, if they are genuinely disgusted with their sweet oppressor role, is to throw whatever power they can our way, not as co-planners, but as bourgeois sympathizers and supporters. The most serious ones will not need us if they want to settle their own accounts with their system. At this late date it's no secret that black people who

have taken white radicals seriously have ended up using their guts to stop police bullets while their white cohorts just disappeared, surviving to raise bail money at parties for bourgeois legal fun and games. **THE NEGROES WHO LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN CENTRAL OR LATIN AMERICA IN FACT EXPERIENCE THE NEED TO ATTACH THEMSELVES TO A CULTURAL MATRIX. THEIR PROBLEM IS NOT FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE AFRICANS. THE WHITES OF AMERICA DID NOT METER OUT TO THEM ANY DIFFERENT TREATMENT FROM THAT OF THE WHITES WHO RULED OVER THE AFRICANS.**

There are the fads about culture and how beautiful we are. Amazing, that we who know we're slaves should yet find our condition beautiful. Culture is the environment we function in. If we made it for our own needs, then it's our culture. If someone else made it and imposed it on us for his own purposes, what we have is a slave culture, and we can never speak of our own culture till we have destroyed the alien environment imprisoning us and constructed an environment of our own. In other words, for slaves no culture can exist outside the struggle to take over our environment and shape it ourselves—unless we are content with the slave tatters now called our culture.

A TRUE CULTURE CANNOT COME TO LIFE UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS. IT WILL BE TIME ENOUGH TO TALK OF THE BLACK GENIUS WHEN THE BLACK MAN HAS REGAINED HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE.

There's our celebrated soul, which our French-enslaved brothers call *negritude* and our Latin-enslaved brothers have called *negrismo*. Qualities that make it seem not so awfully bad to remain slaves after all, qualities that have always been gold mines for white exploiters, record companies, writers, entertainment impresarios, imitative white musicians who make millions aping stuff turned out by black people unable to eat off the genuine sounds, till now the white hippies come by thinking soul is hiding their fat bank account so they can identify with us, us being in their minds the same as poverty, dirt and the smell of syphilitic goats.

IT IS THE WHITE MAN WHO CREATES THE NEGRO. BUT IT IS THE NEGRO WHO CREATES NEGRITUDE. WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED THE BLACK SOUL IS A WHITE MAN'S ARTIFACT.

Womanhood: the talk is never ending. Even the sisters have been taking some of it seriously, wondering if it really would be best for the nonexistent revolution if they walked a certain respectful number of steps behind their posturing, bullshitting prerevolution-

ary brothers, whatever prerevolutionary is supposed to mean. **(WE) MUST GUARD AGAINST THE DANGER OF PERPETUATING THE FEUDAL TRADITION WHICH HOLDS SACRED THE SUPERIORITY OF THE MASCULINE ELEMENT OVER THE FEMININE. WOMEN WILL HAVE EXACTLY THE SAME PLACE AS MEN, NOT JUST IN THE CLAUSES OF THE CONSTITUTION BUT IN THE LIFE OF EVERY DAY. IN REALITY, THE EFFERVESCENCE AND THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT HAVE BEEN KEPT ALIVE BY THE WOMAN IN THE HOME. FOR REVOLUTIONARY WAR IS NOT A WAR OF MEN. DECOLONIZATION IS THE VERITABLE CREATION OF NEW MEN. BUT THIS CREATION OWES NOTHING OF ITS LEGITIMACY TO ANY SUPERINTERNATIONAL POWER; THE "THING" WHICH HAS BEEN COLONIZED BECOMES MAN DURING THE SAME PROCESS BY WHICH IT FREES ITSELF.**

Manhood: there are those of us who, if words had power to do anything but impress foolish women, would have made the millennial revolution a million times over. Questions are still asked: what is the proper role of a black man now? But what ever was the proper role of any slave except to end his slavery? Fanon did not waste time about these masturbatory questions. For him the enslaved male

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