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Black Skin, White Masks



Synopsis

Few modern voices have had as profound an impact on the black identity and critical race theory as Frantz Fanon, and *Black Skin, White Masks* represents some of his most important work. Fanon's masterwork is now available in a new translation that updates its language for a new generation of readers. A major influence on civil rights, anti-colonial, and black consciousness movements around the world, *Black Skin, White Masks* is the unsurpassed study of the black psyche in a white world. Hailed for its scientific analysis and poetic grace when it was first published in 1952, the book remains a vital force today from one of the most important theorists of revolutionary struggle, colonialism, and racial difference in history.

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Customer Reviews

Frantz Fanon was a black man born in the French colony and island of Martinique. He trained as a doctor specialising in psychiatry. He was deeply concerned about the impact of colonialism on the people of colour, particularly how it humiliated them, destroyed their culture, values and dignity. This led him to get involved in the Algerian war of independence in the 1950s. The book "*Black Skin, White Masks*" was written almost fifty years ago. This was during the time when decolonisation of the African continent and elsewhere was gathering momentum. To adequately capture and assimilate Fanon's thinking of the question of colonialism and racism and their impact on the coloured people, one also needs to read Fanon's other great works: "*The Wretched of the Earth*" and "*Dying Colonialism*". Here one can see his anger and the background to his conclusion that it

was only through violence that people of colour could liberate themselves from colonialism, particularly from mental bondage and inferiority complex that accompanied colonial subjugation. In "Black Skin, White Masks", Fanon develops his thesis about the impact of inferiority complex of subjugated peoples and the alienation of some of them from their kind resulting in their wish to identify with the colonialists or imitate the European. There are a number of celebrated and classic cases of coloured people who have tried various formulas to change the colour of their skins, the tone of their voices or their names so that they sound more civilised (European). Fanon's ideas about how the coloured people can liberate themselves (physically and mentally) influenced many leaders of revolutionary movements that were fighting colonialism. Some organisations in the USA, such as the Nation of Islam, appear to embrace a lot of Fanon's ideas and thinking. The book is recommended reading for those who wish to understand the impact of colonialism on the colonised around the world and their different reactions to this menace.

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* has something for every reader of every color (including white). His insights into the psychological damage resulting from colonialism, self-denial, racism, and other connected phenomena provide a path for those of us still grappling with these issues some forty years after the publication of this text. Moreover, his intellectual contributions are secondary to the compelling force of his personality and integrity that one senses between the lines. This book is as compelling as a novel and as enlightening as a mentor.

Fanon's amazing book is one of the landmarks in modern thinking, as far as I am concerned. Fanon says he wants to expose the sickness in order for it to be cured. He exposes the sickness inflicted on Africans by the contact with the colonizing white West in a razor sharp accuracy and courage. Fanon is completely honest, sparing no criticism from the Africans nor the Europeans. He gets help from giant figures like Césaire and Senghor, and creates an emotionally and intellectually charged masterpiece. I learned from Fanon about the use of language as a colonialist tool, the terrible affect on African self esteem, the psychological turmoil that erupts as a result of the contact with white society. It is clear the world is not the same today as it was in the 50's, but Fanon's book is just as relevant. Quoting from Sartre talking about another book by Fanon: "Have the courage to read this book!".

This book has provided me with a tremendous sense, not only as a black person, but an educated minority having difficulty managing the world of white and black. The more I've progressed

academically and professionally, the more I felt marginalized by both peoples, particular by other blacks. After a recent haranguing experience with a former co-worker, I decided I had enough and began reading on what it means to be black to be refute such nonsense. And this book provided in ways I could not have possibly expected. The first aspect of critical importance was, what I felt Fanon's exploration of the psychology of being black, both male and female. Males pathologic plight lies in his desire to self-actualize and be seen as a man while women's plight derives from the need to be financial secure and to have assurance that her offspring will be not only taken cared of but in a socio-economic position higher than hers. Because of which, have incentives to go "white." Fanon identifies the problem to be an economic issue at its root, and the epidermalization of inferiority at its core. The black intellectual is a special case, alienated by his fellow men adopted the vernacular and behavior of whites only to further push him from his people. Worse is the consciousness that the other culture (whites) did not fully accept you as their own, for the simple reason that you were "of a different kind." This was an ugly pathologic death spiral that would lead first to him hating all other blacks then me hating his self. On all account, this describes my very own psychology, and the general tone of so many blacks I've come across. Second critical theme of this book was its exploration at all the "solutions" to the plight of blacks, usually espoused by blacks themselves. The first solution involved adopting "whiteness" (through language, dress, and behavior) Fanon explored and is shown to be naïf, as whites will always believe themselves, at some subconscious level, superior. The next solution of reverting back to some prior of culture, ergo some African culture is argued to be an equally incredulous idea, as, at its root, this also demands an acceptance of socio-economic levels based on non-normative things such as culture or race. Worse is the solution that there "is no race" or blackness not mattering or no longer mattering. This is perhaps the most credulous of all false pretensions provided thus far. There is simply no such thing nor will there ever be, as race and culture is something forever imbued in the genome of man. As seen through personal experience, blacks truly do have an inescapable neurotic inferiority within their sociogenic memory due to the racist society they reside. It is this environment that lead to, at a subconscious level that slowly ruminates outward, guilt in the presence of whites for being black. While whites will continually provide recognition of blacks only as they show subservience to the values they prescribe upon blacks ("toothy smile" and "docileness") and the degree of adaptation of themselves into their culture. The final theme explores the true solution to blackness. The demanding of blacks of nothing short of is treated with respect and recognition as people and holders of culture of equal value. That since blacks forgone physical strife for their rights, the only option and solution for equality in the eyes of whites, and of themselves, is of demanding the

inalienable right that all men have. Their right is to demand certain human behavior from another and duty of not renouncing my free thought or personal choices for another. I need not fit any particular stereotype. "I travel the world endlessly creating myself. Whenever a man presupposes anything about me for the mere reason of my skin color, I will vehemently and unmercifully defend myself and require his thinking and actions change, as this is fundamental to my humanity under god."Thank you Dr. Fanon for writing a book, that despite being 60 years old, still provides a candid and truthful expos  of the pathology of blacks in modernity. Particular those in this day and age stripped of heritage and pride, who all they have in their past is Jim crow and slavery, it is good to know that if youth are willing to look, there are plenty books to enlighten and strengthen them by providing powerful definitions on exactly who they really are. Just as this 232 pager did for me.

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