

For Black Self-Love

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ALIENATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

are the principal concerns around which Frantz Fanon built his fruitful and very short life. The alienation to which he devoted so much study is between black men and white: It was never enough for him to know that black men are persecuted; he had to know why in the deepest part of himself. The reconstruction for which he worked as a psychiatrist and a political activist was in the minds of men of color everywhere: He wished for them to learn to love themselves and to see themselves through their own eyes and not through the eyes of those who despised them.

This last of his three books to be published in English was the first to be published in the original French, when Fanon was 27 years old. There is an eerie quality in his combination of youth and genius. And there is, knowing that he died at the age of 36, a haunting feeling that he swept across our universe and flung these pages in our path, almost as a challenge to those who remain and try to understand.

That he is not always easy to understand in this book is a fault, I think, of the haste in which it appears to have been written. It seems at times that he did not have the patience to complete a thought, so important to him was the next one.

A native of the French Antillean island of Martinique, Fanon was a French-trained physician who spent the last of his vital days in Algeria with the rebels, dying of cancer in Washington in 1961.

His concerns, set forth in sometimes clinical fashion, are rooted in an uncompromising insistence on black liberation above all else:

"I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe."

As for himself:

Book Review

'Black Skin, White Masks'

By Frantz Fanon (Grove Press, 232 pp., \$5).

"The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions."

"I am my own foundation."

This book is filled with the declarative, certain statements of a man involved with himself and the routes toward his liberation.

His examination of the nature of white reaction to his blackness is unsparing and scathing in the manner of a surgeon using the tools of psychiatry (and one is not always capable of judging the validity of all of the uses to which he puts that very inexact art). The white reaction, he says, is on the genital level. He relentlessly pursues the proposition that it is the hopeless white fixation on the notion of the Negro as a sexual superman that arouses and sustains the psychosis that reveals itself under what we call racism.

His language is capable of, simultaneously, elegance and grisliness. Here is his perhaps overly optimistic and yet gruesome metaphoric prognosis for America:

"On the field of battle, its four corners marked by the scores of Negroes hanged . . . a monument is slowly being built that promises to be majestic.

"At the top of this monument, I can already see a white man and a black man hand in hand."

Fanon was less optimistic about the French colonial world and uncertain of what kind of future it ought in any case to have.

In this book he speaks of himself as French and ties his destiny to the motherland. Later, in "Wretched of the Earth," he called for a Third World society, built on a new model, and not that of the European culture. The principal contribution of the present volume is not its political analyses, but the force and brilliance with which the case for black self-love is made.