The Wretched of the Earth Study Guide

The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

In a way unlike other cries for black liberation from the 1960s such as *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin, *The Wretched of the Earth* presents a durable intellectual framework based on medical as well as sociological evidence, for the abolition of colonial (white) rule. The book lays out a clear blueprint for revolution and considers all of its potential consequences, for rebel and colonialist alike.

Born in the Caribbean island nation of Martinique, Frantz Fanon was a French-educated black psychiatrist who was placed as a staff physician in a hospital in the French colony of Algeria in Northern Africa in the 1950s. When he understood that most of the mental illness he treated there resulted in some manner from the oppression of colonialism, his political awakening led his sympathies to the rebels. His first book*, Black Skin, White Masks*, was published when he was twenty-seven and describes his experiences as a black psychiatrist in the Caribbean.

In a lengthy preface, the French existentialist philosopher/writer Jean-Paul Sartre admonishes Europeans and whites in general to read Dr. Fanon's book closely and heed its message. In chillingly premonitory language from 1961, Sartre describes the dawn of a new age: "Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close and listen, for they are talking of the destiny they will mete out to your trading centers and to the hired soldiers who defend them."

Sartre elaborates that any attempt to domesticate a member of one's own species is futile since it only reduces the efficiency of the person enslaved, either legally or economically, until it costs the colonialist more to keep that person in bondage than to find some other way to get the work done. Echoing William Faulkner who wrote that slavery makes beasts of the men who enslave, Sartre says the economic slavery of colonialism makes its subjects stronger men than their overlords.

Fanon's understanding of the dynamics of colonialism as well as of revolt are presented in this book is in specific relationship to the Algerian struggle to throw off the shackles of French colonial rule. But the lessons learned, tactics used, and sequelae of a rebellion were quickly adapted and assimilated by American blacks in their struggles for civil, political, and economic justice of the 1960s. In that sense, *The Wretched of the Earth* is not only an interesting piece of contemporary history, but also a living political manifesto that can find application in any number of exploitative situations.

Frankly Marxist in places, the work is finally a synthesis of many lines of thought that also include socialism and democracy. It is Frantz Fanon's distillation of the political truths that he knows, written in earnest and with a sense of urgency that sounds fresh today.

Chapter 1, Concerning Violence

Chapter 1, Concerning Violence Summary and Analysis

Upon reading the first page, indeed the first paragraph, the reader realizes at once there is a vast difference between Frantz Fanon's approach to the black struggle and that of Rev. Martin Luther King's nonviolent consciousness raising. Fanon asserts that decolonization is always a violent struggle and those who would undertake it must be prepared to get and keep the upper hand.

Although Frantz Fanon does not endorse violence per se, he describes the act of colonization wherein one class of human beings subjugates another as pure violence, often accompanied by the brutality of knives and guns. Wherever there is colonization there is institutionalized violence of a type that systematically robs the native of his civil, economic, and human rights, and is thus a highly abnormal and unnatural condition, the psychiatrist says.

A complete upheaval of the colonial order in which one class of humans supplants another will only come about "after a murderous and decisive battle between the two protagonists." This struggle is inevitable and a natural outgrowth of the inherent inequality, according to Fanon. But the struggle is not only with the colonialist and the colonial system, he says, but also with the retrograde behavior patterns and self-inflicted injuries that the system causes the native to endure.

Once again, Fanon observes the violence inherent in the separate but unequal division of the colonialist society into settlers and natives who live separately with the obvious balance of power and wealth in the hands of the colonialists. Indigenous peoples thus become strangers in their own land, forced by the European settlers to assimilate their culture, language, and laws. To make this kind of exploitation work, Fanon says, the colonialist develops a whole repertoire of dehumanizing language and attitudes towards the natives.

They are not merely primitive, not simply unable to adapt to the colonialist system of values and beliefs, but beasts, animals, incapable of ethics or the more civilized modes of behavior—according to the settler's view. If natives are primal beasts, evil in their very nature, then violence and brutality are not only appropriate but necessary, in the mindset of the settlers, according to Fanon. During the period of colonization, the settler forces the native to accept and swear allegiance to his values, but during liberation the native must regurgitate those values in order to reclaim his humanity, the psychiatrist says.

Against this background, the morality of the native is simple: to replace the settler, to oust him from his position of power, to take his place as the privileged one. To achieve this goal the settler is prepared for anything—including violence. As the native

population approaches the stage of decolonization, according to Fanon, there is a phase of desensitization or apathy when the native realizes the huge undertaking involved in throwing off colonial power. Once more, the native tries adaptation and accommodation but once again ends in anger and frustration as he realizes the shallowness of the colonialist values of equality and fairness.

Specifically, the native who becomes restless and discontent with his place in the colonial society realizes that the white man's philosophy of individualism and self-reliance denies the indigenous value of brotherhood and a sense of community, which have been time-honored means of survival. In reaching the awareness of self and its deprivations in the colonialist scheme, Fanon says, the native begins to rediscover the strengths of his own culture as distinct from that of the settler.

As this awareness grows and spreads, the native/rebel will find many of the so-called intellectual elite—who are natives assimilated into the colonialist society and economic structure—resist and try to block reform, while the native/rebel's natural allies in the simple folk of the rural areas often are unaware of any change, or that change is even possible. But all natives in the society must be educated that colonialism and its power structure can be traced all the way back to the wealthy European country that benefits from the exploitation of the native, Fanon declares.

The next stage of decolonization is marked by a rise in criminal acts committed by natives against natives as they use each other as surrogates for their white overlords and vent their frustrations on one another, according to the psychiatrist. This is the cause of the spike in crimes of murder, rape, and robbery in North Africa since colonialism and the reason why the white settlers shake their heads and agree with each other that this if proof of the inferiority of the native population and evidence of their need for external governance. But behind all of this violence and criminality is the dream by the native that he will eventually throw out the oppressor and become the persecutor, Fanon says.

This native-on-native violence is a form of avoidance, according to the psychiatrist/revolutionary. By indulging in "a fraternal bloodbath," the native population distracts itself from the ultimate and inevitable question of confronting the colonialist powers by armed resistance. Once again, in reaching the stage of preparedness for this action, the native must overcome not only the threats posed by the colonialist police and power structure but his own ethnic folkways and tribal customs against aggressiveness. These include panoply of zombies, creatures great and small, and spirits waiting to punish the native who transgresses against social norms—including taking up arms against the colonialists.

Another way in which the native copes with the oppression of colonialism is in dance that, in its intensity, resembles possession by otherworldly spirits. Any anthropological study of a native population held in the grip of colonialism should pay careful attention to these dances, Fanon says, because they are an indicator, a thermometer, that measures the level of frustration and how close to the boiling point it has reached. In these "muscular orgies," the native channels his aggression and violence into a

programmed and systematic ritual. As a form of exorcism of evil spirits, such social rituals serve the purpose of allowing the native to accommodate to a social system that is far more dangerous to health and welfare than zombies and spirits.

But once the fight for freedom commences, there will be a striking abandonment of these rituals in favor of direct political and/or military action, according to Fanon. In this direct action, the suppressed anger that fuels the frenzied dances often turns quite naturally to violence. And this anger becomes further inflamed as the native realizes the many ways he has been frustrated, cheated, and exploited by colonialism at the same time that a small elite of natives has been allowed to prosper by, in effect, selling their souls to the Europeans.

As if on cue, the colonialist bourgeoisie begins to call for non-violence and for the native to sit down with the settler to come to some kind of reconciliation for the good of the people. This is obviously a ploy to halt the completion of a native rebellion that threatens the entire structure of colonialism that benefits and enriches the colonizing nation, Fanon points out. In the 1960s, American black militants referred to this process as co-optation, or selling out. There may come a time in the revolutionary process to meet with the enemy around a table, but at this early stage of change it can only benefit the colonial system by derailing the uprising.

In fact, the colonizing nation has no interest in violence directed toward native peoples because they have become consumers of goods imported from that country, according to Fanon. Whereas capitalism once viewed colonies merely as providers of resources that could be used to produce manufactured items and the native as only a cheap source of labor, at the time of the struggle for independence most colonies have become markets. Capitalism itself demands living consumers, not mere slaves, to thrive so the native elite within the colony takes a position of non-violence essentially because a violent uprising would be bad for business.

In its efforts at pacification, the colonialist bourgeoisie is aided and abetted by religion, Fanon says. By holding out as moral examples those saints who suffered in silence or turned the proverbial other cheek to tormentors, the church helps to reinforce the social norms that buttress colonial power. All of these factors stand as obstacles in the path of the natives/rebels who at this stage of the struggle have not yet articulated a clear social or political program beyond a statement of basic demands for change. All of these events are part of what Fanon calls a "ripening process" that sets the stage for true revolution.

Because colonialism does not exist in a vacuum, the early stirrings of rebellion may spread to other colonies and cause colonialists to back off from repressive measures directed toward the natives/rebels. But everywhere there is violence in the air as the native channels all of his resentment away from frenzied dancing, killing his fellow native, and other self-destructive acts into violence aimed at the settler, Fanon observes. At this point, the settlers become aware of the threat to their way of life posed by the unrest and the colonialist regime may organize displays of military force,

parades, and the firing of weapons—which only whets the appetite of the rebel for real blood-letting.

As this dress rehearsal for armed conflict escalates on both sides—native and settler—fear increases and nerves become frayed and, as if by themselves, guns are fired back and forth and the violent revolution has started, even without an official call for an armed uprising by the existing political parties. Mass killings of natives by settlers result from fear, Fanon says, and serve to further accelerate the pace of violence as established leaders are overtaken and overpowered by the rush of events in the streets.

The common natives know intuitively that only violence can free them, faced as they are with the overwhelming economic and military strength of the colonialists. This belief is pervasive because it has become embedded as a slogan in the platform of the major political party or parties, according to the psychiatrist. In fact, the attachment to violence is so seductive that even after rebels have thrown off the colonial mantle, the violence may well continue as capitalism and socialism wage battles for control of the economy.

Even after new leaders are installed, they may continue to spout the rhetoric of violence and revolution that explains why some citizens of other nations find them rude. In a somewhat dated example, he cites former Soviet Premier Nikita Kruschev banging his shoe on the table at the United Nations and Cuban President Fidel Castro wearing revolutionary military garb to the same assembly as examples of how important it can be to socialists to demonstrate their readiness to resort to violence against capitalism. The truth is, these leaders are harshly rhetorical with foreigners, but ever courteous and obliging to their countrymen, according to Fanon.

Although leaders of major nations such as the United States and the USSR recognize the importance of peaceful coexistence in the context of the Cold War, paradoxically this situation seems to nourish violence in colonial countries. Thus it seems logical, Fanon asserts, for black militants in the United States to organize armed militias such as the Black Panthers or for humanists worldwide to organize committees for the protection of persecuted Jews in the Soviet Union.

In the earliest stages of rebellion against colonialism, the native becomes accommodated to a middle ground somewhere between the open violence in the colonies and the "peaceful violence" which is familiar worldwide, according to Fanon. The native becomes the most complete political creature imaginable, and goes to great lengths to stay informed about daily developments in the political arena where the struggle is focused. Although the rebel/native may have seized the moral high ground in the fight for independence, there is at this stage still no truly native post-colonial society or culture because the fight itself consumes so much time and energy.

Because colonialism has destroyed the aboriginal culture and society, the birth of a new order can only come from the disintegration of the colonialist structure, according to Fanon.

As the struggle intensifies, every man is identified by the work he does for liberation and there is no quarter for the slacker or parasite. Violence escalates as both sides respond to aggression by the other, although clearly the advantage in military might is initially in the hands of the colonialists, Fanon observes. But as the battle becomes joined, a spiral of violence and hatred develops familiar to anyone aware of events in Algeria of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the Middle East, Vietnam, and North Africa.

Despite the lack of a post-revolutionary society at this stage, the natives/rebels develop strong bonds in their struggle against colonialism. When the battle is won, they soon realize the fight against poverty, illiteracy and ignorance must begin and thus the struggle continues. Another obstacle to progress comes in the form of achieving unity among various tribes and factions, since colonialism has effectively played brother against brother to maintain its supremacy over the native population.

When he looks at the prosperity of European nations, Fanon concludes that the emergence of a middle class in those countries occurred at about the same time and without the stifling influence of colonialism. Bitterly, he concludes that the wealth and progress of Europe was achieved with the toil and sacrifice of blacks, Arabs, Asians, and Indians who have not yet enjoyed the fruits of their labors, Decolonization is but the first step toward righting these historical wrongs, and natives must resist the threat by colonialists that if their rebellion succeeds they will automatically regress instead of progress.

Fanon advises post-colonial societies to eschew the route of capitalism—which has caused them most of the woes against which they fought—and to pursue instead socialism that is centered on the worth of the individual, rather than the corporation. By choosing this path, he says, citizens of the newly liberated society will gladly dedicate themselves to hard work for the collective good. But the new society demands new managers who must, for a while, follow some of the old trade patterns of the colonialists until by consensus the country determines how to move forward with its economy in a balanced way, not focused on exploitation of labor and exportation of raw resources.

And the rise of Third World nations should not be interpreted by the older nations of Europe as a threat but rather a sign that economic and social cooperation is on the horizon, Fanon says. Both former colonialists and former subjects need each other to advance.

Chapter 2, Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness

Chapter 2, Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Fanon explores in depth the dynamics of an effective anti-colonialist revolution. He describes and explains the push-me-pull-you transitional points that mark the road from colonialism to independence, drawing from recent history and his own knowledge of the Algerian situation.

For example, he mentions as parallel situations the fact that in Kenya before the Mau-Mau rebellion, British colonial forces aided and abetted by Christian missionaries waged an unsuccessful campaign to drive back into the countryside young Kenyans who came into the cities seeking work and a better way of life. Likewise, in Congo, Belgian colonialist military forces in 1957 removed "hooligan" rural youths from the cities and placed them in resettlement camps operated by clergy. Both were effective acts of political castration.

These facts only underline the truth that an enormous reservoir of energy and strength is available to native rebels in the rural *lumpenproletariat* of a colonialist nation, Fanon says. In fact, he says, the biggest mistake that rebel political movements make in underdeveloped countries is to first approach the educated, elite bourgeoisie of natives who live in the cities. Because this class of people has the most to lose by turning against the colonial authorities, it is the least likely to embrace the movement.

National revolutionary political parties usually show an indifference, or perhaps a disdain, for the rural peasants and assume they are so bogged down in feudal patterns of life they will not be receptive to the message of liberation. In truth, however, these are the people whose hearts nurture perhaps the clearest vision of equitable nationhood, brotherhood, and economic progress, according to the psychiatrist. At last, frustrated by attempts to enroll urbanites into their movement and hounded by colonialist forces, the rebels will be forced into the countryside and contact with the rural *lumpenproletariat*.

But before making contact with the rural peasants, reformers must work their way through a protective shield erected and maintained by local chiefs and tribal potentates who side with the colonialists because it is in their own economic interest. These local factotums who serve as re-enforcers of the colonialist regime look with skepticism, and much fear, upon the nationalists who threaten their positions and livelihoods. The rural peasants may resent others from their class who have fled to the cities in search of a better life, and rigidly guard their tribal and folk customs.

Colonialists usually are skilled at exploiting this rift between urban and rural dwellers to maintain their grip on power, Fanon observes. Unfortunately, political parties,

inexperienced in organizing in rural areas, often make the mistake of ignoring or harassing local tribal chiefs, which makes their task even more difficult. However, rural peasants aren't stupid and are capable of taking matters into their own hands, according to Fanon. As an example, he mentions the 1947 rebellion in Madagascar in which the rural peasants, feeling threatened by the colonialist liquidation of a progressive political party, joined the general revolt armed with spears, stick and stones and fought furiously and successfully against colonial forces.

Such spontaneous action on the part of the rural masses arouses the approval, but not the active support, of traditional party leaders. Too often, when an opportunity appears in such a situation to organize the peasants effectively into the national movement on, the old schism between cities and rural areas becomes dishearteningly clear, And yet, it is precisely this group of people who will drive the movement once again from the country back to the cities and across the nation in a flash-fire of freedom.

But before that happens, the colonialists will attempt to drive wedges between different groups of natives based on tribal affiliation, ethnic differences and urban/rural geography, Fanon says. Initially, the rebel movement may rely on the country folk who exhibit a "retrograde, emotional and spontaneous" nature in the struggle. But sometimes the movement may depend upon the support of progressives in the labor unions, even though most of those progressives haven't a clue about how to organize rural peasants. Their strength is primarily in the towns and cities where, indeed, the trade unions have the power to slow and disrupt the colonial economy, according to Fanon.

In the rush to gain power, the independence movement may temporarily bypass the rural poor for the quick gains to be made through the agency of unions, but eventually it dawns on the labor leaders they have not yet tapped into the potential power of the country people through effective organization. Aware of this, the rural peasants again feel shunned and shut out as much by the rebels as by the colonialists. When the movement decides to attempt an overthrow of the government, the peasant farmers are used as canon fodder by both sides in an effort to gain credibility for their positions.

Once the revolution starts to develop some momentum, there is a split within national political parties between those who wish to abolish colonialism and those who think it's possible to come to some kind of terms with it, according to Fanon. At this stage, the true revolutionaries may find themselves increasingly isolated and begin to entertain doubts about the future of their movement. The party stalwarts, on the other hand, have embraced political change as the only means for them to become truly human and suffer arrest, jailing and torture to emerge as heroes. By fits and starts, the resolution proceeds in the streets and behind bars.

Harassed, threatened, and bullied in the towns and cities, the rebel leaders flee to the countryside where they are wrapped in the warm and strong support of the peasants who have always known that a violent struggle must ensue in order to take back their lands from the colonialists. Once the revolutionaries begin to communicate and bond with the *lumpenproletariat*, Fanon says, "an explosive mixture of unusual potentiality" is

unleashed. Charged with new energy and recruits, the rebels decide to carry the struggle directly to the gold-leafed doors of the colonialists' mansions.

And it is in the ghetto fringes of the cities where the unemployed and displaced urban natives live in squalor that the most spontaneous and explosive force for revolution will be found, according to Fanon. As the movement for independence gathers steam, marginal ghetto figures such as pimps, hoodlums, and slackers will become swept up in the fervor and abandon their pointless lifestyles in favor of putting their energies into the rebellion and behind a common objective to rid their native land of the foreign oppressors. Ancient feuds and animosities, too, are swept away in the first spontaneous rush of hope, Fanon says.

The initial period of euphoria will then be followed by the colonialist reaction—likely to be brutally militaristic in its ferocity. How the rebels respond to this retaliation may determine the outcome. In Angola, for example, Fanon writes that the colonialist Portuguese launched a savage counter-attack, machine gunning thousands of natives. The rebel leaders then decided on a different tactic involving guerrilla warfare, to win their cause. This is the point when the goals and determination of the rebels are seriously challenged, and when determination and courage alone can sustain the cause.

Wise rebel leaders will realize at this point the necessity of educating and indoctrinating the multiple groups that have joined or may join the rebellion, as well as the need for some rudimentary organizational structure and an army. Spontaneity can carry the movement so far for a few days or weeks, but the cooler headed leaders quickly understand the urgency of moving from slogans to strategies, according to Fanon. In the midst of this changing dynamic, too, the enemy changes tactics. The colonial powers may well lighten their military presence and seek to placate the rebels while playing one faction off against another.

If the enemy is successful in re-igniting tribal conflicts, the entire rebel movement may begin to dissolve and a few leaders may see that political education of the masses is an historical imperative if liberation is to move forward. Resentment, revenge, and racialism alone cannot sustain the revolution for long, and leaders are called upon to articulate a clear national vision that transcends both the struggle against colonialism as well as the tribal animosities that threaten it. The leaders of the movement should also husband their resources and not expend all their political and military resources in the initial fight, since colonialism is better equipped and wealthier than the rebels, the psychiatrist points out.

As the colonialist powers seek to de-fuse the revolution, the natives should not be taken in by the blandishments of the settlers. They should remember, Fanon says, that any concessions offered by the foreign government at this point are the result of his struggle and not the benevolence of the colonialists. Here, again, the true revolutionaries will encounter the inertia of the few blacks who have been allowed into the elite of colonialist society, those who do not especially favor a rebellion. But at the same time,

there will be those among the colonialists who will side with the rebels and support their cause.

Chapter 3, The Pitfalls of National Consciousness

Chapter 3, The Pitfalls of National Consciousness Summary and Analysis

Fanon discusses at length the fragile state of national unity and the threats to its survival that could undermine and eventually destroy the decolonialist rebellion. He also poses the age-old Marxist question whether a bourgeoisie is a phase of the revolution that can be, in effect, skipped on the road to independence.

Once the slogans are no longer chanted and the emotions that drive rebellion have started to cool, the delicate veneer of national consciousness begins to fall prey to regional and tribal interests and the revolutionary government creates just another class of petty bourgeoisie interested in pursuing their own welfare at the expense of others, Fanon says. This new middle class is counter-revolutionary in the extreme and creates a new hurdle for a truly popular, representative form of government.

This condition can not be blamed solely on the damaging effects of colonialism, but rather on the spiritual poverty, intellectual sluggishness and sophisticated pretense of the middle class that, in its vanity, supposes itself to be like the middle class of the mother country. This colonial middle class has no real industrial titans or leaders, but exhibits the mindset of the businessman whose primary ambition is just to survive, according to Fanon.

But this post-colonialist middle class has no real understanding of economics or its place in the economy, or of the natural and human resources of its nation. The bourgeoisie demands the nationalization of the economy—not for the good of all the people but because it hopes to benefit from some of the corrupt and unjust practices of the former colonial regime. In its passivity and lack of imagination, this middle class expects to serve as the intermediary between international corporations and the native population—sort of an enlightened, populist colonialism.

But this approach can not work, Fanon says, because the post-colonial middle class identifies too closely with the corrupt bourgeoisie of the west and because "it is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness or the will to succeed of youth." So, in effect, this middle class begins to act as tourist guides to the industrialized nations of Europe, to their nation's resources for exploitation and to its casinos and easy women.

Despite any slogans about agricultural reforms before the rebellion, the middle class now demands more work, more output from farm workers and abandons any plans for modernization or rural development, Fanon says. At first, the poor farm workers are puzzled why Europeans can have dozens of varieties of grapes exported from their

country while they can't afford to have any. They then realize that it's because of profiteering on their labor by the middle class, and they come to know the value of themselves and their own native soil, Fanon says. Above all, the middle class stands for the status quo and seeks at any cost to avoid risks.

The result is a demoralizing swing between the new national unity and the old patterns of racism and exploitation. And still, the former colony's economy hasn't been restructured to serve the interests of the natives, rather than to benefit the colonial powers of Europe. The disparities of wealth that resulted from the haphazard way the colonialists exploited the country remain, so a uniform national prosperity is still far from a reality, according to Fanon. Those natives who are fortunate to live in one of the more prosperous areas set about ensuring their prosperity and refuse to carry their weight in moving the economy forward in a more equitable manner.

In fact, Fanon says, there is a very real danger that the national unity that held various groups together during the struggle for liberation will disintegrate behind the mask of unity and dissolve into regional and tribal struggles, which will then further devolve into religious conflicts. If this occurs, the vestiges of colonialism will use these rivalries to once again dilute the strength of the people by playing off groups against each other. Then the stage will be set for a resurgence of some of the most obnoxious manifestations of colonialism, such as overt racial discrimination and paternalism by colonialists toward natives.

The only way to avoid this fate is for the newly-liberated people of Africa to understand that the bourgeoisie will do everything possible to block their progress, and that the only path to unity is through the coordinated push of the people, under their own leadership, to reach their goals despite resistance from the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, Fanon says. At this stage, a leader will emerge who tries to bring stability while advancing the interests of the people. This person at first seems to personify the goals of the revolution, but over time is revealed as an opportunist who merely wants to line his pockets as well as those of the bourgeoisie.

As the people become aware of the leader's true motives, their demands become more strident while the leader seeks to consolidate his power in a dictatorship. The leader tries to advance the interests of the bourgeoisie while placating the masses and trying to lull them into a false sense of security, according to Fanon. The national political party that once serves as an instrument of the people becomes nothing more than an authoritarian bureaucracy to pass directives from top to bottom. There is no more give-and-take in both directions, as before and during the revolution.

The militants who made the rebellion possible are marginalized by the party apparatus, become disheartened and disappear into the crowd. Soon the party itself, cut off from the people, begins to disintegrate. Meanwhile, corruption within the stagnant regime spreads as the bourgeoisie short-circuits the political process and installs a fascist government, such as has been witnessed in Chile and other South American countries, Fanon says. The people become aware that their interests are no longer represented, and open hostility rises between the masses and those in power once again.

The only way to avoid this disaster, according to Fanon, is to bypass the rise of the bourgeoisie with its Eurocentric greed and to focus on those honest intellectuals who mistrust the motives of those engaged in a power grab after the toppling of the colonialist regime, those who would be willing to unselfishly guide the new country to true self-determination. A crucial step in this direction is nationalizing of what Fanon calls "the intermediary sector" of the economy, between global corporatism and local survival. This will prevent the takeover of this area by the bourgeoisie for personal profit and enable the people to make decisions in their own interest.

For example, Fanon proposes the organization of wholesale and retail cooperatives on a democratic, decentralized basis. This must be preceded, again, by political education by a government more interested in empowerment of the citizens than in its own profit and perpetuation. This can be accomplished if the national political party remains viable as a tool for the welfare of the people. Fanon says the leaders of the party in an underdeveloped country should avoid the cities and live in the country where they can be in touch with the people and serve as their mouthpiece and advocate.

Instead of glorifying the capital as the seat of all power and prestige, the new government should designate the interior, the poorer back country, as the privileged locale and even consider moving the capital away from the city to the country where there is greatest need for government services, the psychiatrist says. The new government should have a policy not to lose contact with the rural masses who have fought for their independence. Contrary to the opinion of some who fear that greater involvement of the people will only slow things down, Fanon argues that the opposite is the case: they will speed up the movement.

In the optimum scenario, as the political education of the people continues, they begin to realize that wealth does not necessarily flow from work, but rather from the legalized thievery of individuals, colonialism, and capitalism, and that rich people "are nothing more than flesh-eating animals, jackals and vultures which wallow in the people's blood." When some of the farmland in Algeria was turned over to farm workers after the revolution, output tripled and the peasants came to understand that work is not just sweat but also involves the brain and the soul, Fanon says.

Whereas the colonialist expected his workers to kill themselves so he could profit, the new government in Algeria expects people to work hard so the country may prosper. Young people in the newly liberated nation pose a particular challenge, according to Fanon, because of the unevenness of their mental development and exposure to violence as two cultures clash. With this group of young people, western-style programs that offer recreational and sports activities are neither appropriate nor helpful. What's needed, Fanon says, is some exposure to the world of work and an opportunity to earn some money in a legitimate and healthy way. Therefore, he proposes that programs and services for youth be attached to a Ministry of Labor, in turn connected to a Ministry of Planning, so that realistic learning and working opportunities that will actually benefit youths can be instituted.

In the same vein, political education of the masses must include not only giving them some basic notions about the structure and functioning of government, but also must raise their awareness that their future is their own—and that without their participation they will not be able to actualize their own potential or that of the nation. No one will be able to escape responsibility or participation in the building of this new democracy, Fanon says, and anyone who refuses to get involved "is either a coward or a traitor."

Every project undertaken by the government must arise from and respond to a real need of the people, and those involved in the political process—which is everyone—must also have their political consciousness raised by every government undertaking or it should not be done, according to the psychiatrist. And in the effort to mobilize the entire population, the new government must be absolutely unbiased and fair in ensuring the equality of the sexes in the workplace and in the marketplace. In this post-colonial world, citizens should be more concerned about equality and economic development than the marital goings-on of the ersatz African royalty, Fanon says.

Furthermore, the new government must have clear-cut economic doctrine that covers the issue of distribution of wealth as well as economic development, and a strongly defined sense of humanism that places the value of individuals above the interests of corporations, as well as a sense of values that embraces respect for the rural masses and for the common working man, according to Fanon.

Chapter 4, On National Culture

Chapter 4, On National Culture Summary and Analysis

As the stirrings of revolt begin to energize the natives, a need arises for new forms of cultural expression to give voice to the new consciousness, Fanon says. Since colonialism has throttled not only the native identity but also the indigenous culture and infused the culture of the mother country into the natives, an artistic renaissance often must be preceded by deep research into pre-existing native culture.

It's important for those who are about to throw off the shackles of colonialism to realize that their forbears, however ineffectually, did resist and did fight against colonialism as best they could with the tools at their disposal, and should not be scorned if their efforts did not succeed, according to Fanon. When the first demands for equality and dignity are raised by natives, the colonialist regime responds by feigning deep concern and implementing programs aimed at correcting injustices and abuses. But colonialism soon realizes it is incapable of creating programs of the magnitude to meet the expectations of the natives.

Once both sides—rebels and colonialists—realize that any reforms undertaken by the occupying Europeans will never satisfy the people, the colonial regime resorts to what it knows best: a reign of terror intended to tamp down native demands. In this reactionary cycle, the natives are once again treated as soulless, mindless, uncultured savages. It is this very attitude by the colonizers that supports the myth that all was darkness before the Europeans came and spread their culture and civilization, Fanon notes.

But the discovery of one's own indigenous culture and the revival of artistic expression as a result is one powerful means of reclaiming some basic human dignity for the native, according to the psychiatrist. This awareness of an earlier native culture can help to justify in the native's mind the current struggle for independence and the hope for a better world in the future. The resuscitation of native culture helps to rekindle hope, Fanon says, and a sense of national identity in the wake of colonialism that put all black people into a single category in order to extinguish their individuality.

As an example of how this process works, Fanon cites recent (in 1961) developments in the Arab world where the struggle against colonialism entails throwing off the veneer of Western culture which was implanted in minds of natives as superior to their own culture, just as is the case in other former colonies such as Algeria. The Arab cultural reawakening runs parallel with the reawakening of the entire Islamic religion and culture, according to Fanon. Search for an authentic Arab identity and culture finds its political articulation in the Arab League, and the renewal of cultural ties means that artists across different Arab states are once again communicating with each other.

Likewise, blacks around the globe—in Central and South America and the United States—are seeking their own cultural tradition, which is very much like the search in African

nations because of similar ways in which blacks are treated by whites in all locales. However, upon closer examination, American blacks discovered they had little in common with blacks from, say, Congo, except for their relations with whites, according to Fanon. Beyond that, they recognized that culture is a national (regional) phenomenon.

What these former slaves and colonial subjects have in common is overshadowed by the realities of the world today that draws different socioeconomic maps of the world. In seeking a common cultural connection, modern Arabs cannot revive ancient and abandoned trade routes but must relate to the economic world of today to survive. In any event, the reaching out of native intellectuals toward an indigenous native culture, whether racial, religious, or national, is an attempt to find stability in something other than the imported world of the white settler, Fanon says.

This rediscovered or recreated native culture is often rash, boisterous, filled with movement and color, outwardly directed and often violent in expression. As far as native poets and writers are concerned, Fanon says, there are three marked phases of development. First, the native writer demonstrated that he or she has absorbed the colonial culture. The second phase is marked by a break from the colonial culture in which the writer seeks to discover who he or she really is. When the writer reaches the third phase, he or she will have awakened and seeks to awaken others and rouse them into fighting the enemy.

Soon the native artist or writer, having discovered his or her cultural roots, realizes that their true vocation is to depict and refract the contemporary real world—the world from which the future independent state will develop. The authentic artist who hopes to create something of value for his countrymen also learns the importance of collaboration and of total commitment to the cause of independence, Fanon says.

Even though there is a potential unity in, for example, former French colonies such as Senegal and Guinea, each nation has its distinct identity apart from colonialism, Fanon reasons. Therefore, there will never be a single, global black culture because there is no politician with a mission to create black republics and "niggers are disappearing" as the dismantling of colonialism proceeds, according to Fanon. And, he says, there can be no hope for the spread of an African culture devoid of the struggle for liberation from colonialism in Africa.

The beginnings of an authentic African culture can occur when native artists and writers throw off the secrecy of trying to create art in a colonialist society and imitating the art of the mother country. In that transition, the true native art begins to blossom when the artist addresses his own people, rather than the former colonial overlords, Fanon says. When new forms of expression appear, white colonialists and cultural "experts" are mystified and try to find antecedents in the previous, white-influenced forms. Fanon draws a parallel with the explosion of be-bop on the American post-World War II jazz scene—a music not intended for ballroom dancing, a music of anger and rebellion.

Chapter 5, Colonial War and Mental Disorders

Chapter 5, Colonial War and Mental Disorders Summary and Analysis

In this final chapter, Fanon the psychiatrist presents his most incendiary evidence for revolution at any cost to overthrow colonialism. As a physician pledged to follow the Hippocratic oath, Fanon must think first, last and always of the welfare of his patients. In this instance, his patients are the mentally disabled of an Algerian psychiatric hospital. Fanon notes that the psychiatric casualties of warfare have been well studied in the wake of both world wars, but the difference between his work and previous studies reflects the nature of colonialism and rebellion. Whereas in both world wars, the French and Germans who killed and captured each other remained men with their human dignity intact, the victims of colonialism have already lost their humanity before being subjected to such arduous experiences as sadistic torture.

In a series of representative cases he treated at the Algerian hospital, Fanon lays out a cross section of psychiatric maladies stemming from colonialism and the war of rebellion. Psychiatry, Fanon says, tries to cure the patient by effecting a eudaemonious adjustment to society. But in an instance, such as colonialism, where the society is clearly sick and the cause of a full range of psychiatric disorders, there is no point in trying to adjust the individual. In such a case, society itself must be changed to foster the mental health of its citizens because colonialism "is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity," according to Dr. Fanon.

In the period that leads up to armed violence to overthrow colonialism, natives' nervous systems are pushed well beyond their ability to cope and many collapse under the strain and constant pressure, the feeling that they are caught up in an end-of-time struggle. Colonialism, as well as the violence required to end it, both produce psychiatric illness that is manifested by a progressive weakness and depersonalization that, over a course of months, become almost palpable. The cases he presents include patients from hospitals or private psychiatric practices in Algeria, as well as health departments of the Army of National Liberation (FLN).

The first involves a 26-year-old former taxi driver who'd served in nationalist political parties since the age of 18 and who sought treatment for headaches and insomnia. One day, because of street fighting, he had to abandon his cab that contained hidden two machine gun magazines and hide. After several weeks of hiding, his guerrilla commander ordered him back into fighting, with the result being that he did not see his wife or newborn child for several months. Word came that the French police were looking for him because of the weapons found in his cab; this was followed by news

from his wife that she'd been raped by the French soldiers and he should not think of re-joining her because of her disgrace.

In the interim, he was reassigned abroad for a while and during that time tried unsuccessfully to have a sexual affair, but found himself impotent on several occasions. Once, before trying to engage in sex, he tore up a photo of his daughter. Fanon said he at first suspected the patient had unconscious incestuous urges, but later learned that the patient did not love his wife and had planned to divorce her and marry someone else after the war. His insomnia and nervousness increased, and he finally admitted he felt shame and dishonor for both his wife and daughter. After two weeks of therapy, the man said he'd decided to take his wife back after independence.

Another patient was admitted to the hospital with generalized homicidal urges after surviving a massacre in his village during which the French ambushed and destroyed the village, rounded up the men and murdered 29 men at point blank range. The 37-year-old peasant had survived with bullet wounds in his right thigh and left arm, but upon admission muttered constantly and feverishly about getting a machine gun and killing everyone. Deep sleep treatment, perhaps by use of scopolamine, was employed to break through the patient's obsessive state of mind. Within three weeks, the patient's state of nervous agitation had calmed and he was discharged to a social services branch of the FLN to learn a new trade compatible with his disability. Six months later, he was doing well, Fanon reports.

A 19-year-old former student and liberation army soldier came for treatment of an anxiety psychosis after murdering a woman while temporarily insane during combat. The soldier was extremely depressed, and presented with always-moist palms and dry lips, according to Fanon. He suffered from chronic insomnia and had attempted suicide twice. In conversation, the patient exhibited delusional attitudes and said a woman came each night to torment him. The psychiatrists were able to piece together his story: his mother had been shot to death by a French soldier and both of his sisters taken to the soldier's quarters. Later, while searching for a colonial government official in his home, his squad had encountered only his wife. In a rage, the soldier took out his knife and disemboweled her. Each night, a woman appeared to him in several forms demanding that he give her blood back. Fanon believes only time can heal the shattered personality of the young man.

A European policeman came to the hospital with severe depression, mood and behavioral disturbances. Upon examination, the patient said he heard screams at night when he tried to sleep. Recently he'd started closing the shutters although it was summer, and plugging his ears to no avail. Further examination revealed that his job was to torture Algerian prisoners who often screamed as the torture progressed. Fanon prescribed sick leave for this very troubled man, but one day at the hospital another patient—an Algerian rebel who had been a torturing victim of the policeman—encountered him walking on the grounds and panicked. Fanon received a call that the patriot was found in a toilet at his barracks, trying to commit suicide, because he believed the hospital was infiltrated with French police. After being reassured that police were not allowed inside the hospital and that he needed the rest, the patriot was

readmitted to the hospital. The French soldier eventually was transferred back to France.

Another European police inspector came to the hospital for help when he realized that his abusive behavior to his wife and children had gotten completely out of control. Fanon says this policeman, who sometimes tortured rebels and sympathizers for ten hours a day, was smoking five packs of cigarettes a day, had lost his appetite as well as the ability to sleep peacefully at night. While at home, he beat his wife and children savagely. The policeman was aware of the nature of his problem and asked for sick leave to be treated, but was refused. So Fanon tried to treat him while he worked full time as a torturer. Fanon notes that this exercise was probably doomed to failure because the man asked for help in doing his job without feeling any conscience or experiencing behavioral problems.

Two Algerian boys, 13 and 14 years old, came to the hospital for evaluation after murdering their European playmate. Fanon said both young Algerians were quite detached about their action, and admitted the murdered boy had done nothing to provoke the attack. The two had decided to kill him because his father was in the French militia responsible for killing other Algerians. They asked Fanon why no Europeans were ever seen in Algerian prisons, and asked why no French were arrested after their militia dragged forty men from their beds in the village of Rivet and murdered them. Fanon notes he could give them no good answers.

A young Algerian man who had not been involved politically so that he could focus on learning his profession, suddenly became obsessed with the notion that his parents considered him a traitor to the cause of national liberation. He isolated himself from his family, took his meager meals alone in his room, and became gaunt and depressed. When he emerged, bearded and crazed, the young man went into the village and threw himself on the machine gun of a French militiaman, shouting that he was an Algerian. The authorities soon realized he was sick and not a real terrorist, and sent him to the hospital where he confessed his real motive: to take his own life.

A 21-year-old French woman whose father—a high-ranked colonial official—had been killed in a rebel ambush, came to the hospital with a crippling anxiety disorder that manifested itself in sweaty palms, chest constriction, and severe headaches at night. The woman presented a fazade of likeable friendliness that masked her deep fears, Fanon says. Before her father was killed, their relationship had faltered because she could not stand to hear the screams of the tortured where he lived in a rural area. She was repulsed by statements at her father's funeral about the moral superiority of the French, and refused to take an allowance from the government, deciding instead to go to work to support herself.

Fanon also documents cases of behavioral disturbances in the children under 10 years of age who are the offspring of Algerian freedom fighters or of civilians murdered by the French. In their disturbed children, Fanon says, there is a very clear affection for parental images or surrogates as well as a marked noise phobia. They also experience periodic enuresis (bed-wetting) and sadistic tendencies.

There is also a distinct category of mental derangements called puerperal psychoses that affect women around childbirth, characterized by an imbalance of the endocrine system that leads to disordered and violent emotions, according to Fanon. These disorders are caused by the sheer brutality of the French assault upon natives in which, for example, machine gun attacks from the air on civilian populations are permitted. The disorders manifest as deep depression and immobility, suicide attempts, and severe anxiety states.

Fanon devotes a section of this chapter specifically to the types of mental disorders produced by torture, intended to get the victim close to the intolerability level of pain as quickly as possible presumably to get information from him. Some of the methods used include injection of water by mouth accompanied by an enema of soapy water at high pressure, placing a bottle in the anus, making the prisoner stand or lean motionless on threat of beating. Some of the results of these practices include agitated nervous depression, loss of appetite, and motor instability. Patients typically feel a sense of injustice and indifference to moral arguments for or against warfare.

Patients who have been tortured using electricity experience distorted perceptions that cause a generalized tingling sensation, or the sense that their hands have been ripped off; apathy and aboulia (loss of willpower); and electricity phobia. Patients who have been administered sodium pentothal by police disguised as doctors, exhibit verbal stereotypy (repeating the same idea again and again in similar sentences; clouded intellectual or sensory perceptions; profound fear of all private conversations; inhibition and hyper-vigilance).

Fanon considers psychological brainwashing as a form of torture, and identifies two types used in Algeria—one for intellectuals and the other for non-intellectuals. The intellectual responds to his torture by a phobia of groups and collective discussions where the colonialist arguments can be reintroduced, and an inability to explain and defend any particular position. Those subjected to the non-intellectual form of brainwashing learn to repeat that Algeria will be nothing without France, and was nothing before the French came.

Psychosomatic disorders (physical illness caused by a psychiatric illness include stomach ulcers, nephritic colic (stomach distress), menstruation trouble in women, sleeplessness caused by tremor, hair turning white prematurely, paroxysmal tachycardias (racing heartbeat, generalized muscular contraction accompanied by stiffness. Fanon concludes this chapter with a summary of the various explanations advanced by colonialist psychologists, psychiatrists and criminologists to explain Algerian criminality—everything from the assertion that Algerians have under-developed frontal lobes to the claim that Algerians have no moral conscience. Fanon flatly rejects these assertions and notes that criminality has dropped precipitously since the beginning of the rebellion. As Algerians confront and overcome the self-hatred caused by colonialism, criminality will become more manageable, just like other social issues, according to Fanon.

Characters

Frantz Fanon, MD

General Bellounis

Karl Marx

Nikita Kruschev

Keita Fodeba

Dr. A. Carothers

Holden Roberto

Fidel Castro

General Charles De Gaulle

President John Kennedy

Objects/Places

Algeria

This was the North African colony of France where Frantz Fanon worked as a psychiatrist at the time of the Algerian revolution. This was before writing *The Wretched of the Earth*.

North Africa

The portion of the African continent generally that faces on the Mediterranean Sea and where many former European colonies have fought to win their independence.

Vietnam

The Southeast Asian nation that fought for its liberation and independence first against the French, then against the Americans, frequently mentioned in Fanon's book.

Third World

A term used to describe the underdeveloped nations of the world, many of them former colonies peopled by dark-skinned races.

Martinique

The former French colonial island in the Caribbean where Frantz Fanon was born and spent his childhood.

Cuba

The Caribbean island nation just south of Florida that experienced a Marxist revolution led by the Communist Fidel Castro. Fanon admires Castro's swagger and ability to project an air of violence.

United Nations

The voluntary international agency dedicated to achieving world peace, where often revolutionary leaders such as Castro and Kruschev display their contempt for Europe and the West.

Lumpenproletariat

The masses of rural poor who make up the most important element in a popular uprising, according to Fanon.

FLN

Acronym for the Front de Liberation Nationale, the Algerian revolutionary political party that led the Algerian rebellion in the late 1950s. Fanon became active in the FLN after resigning his hospital post in Algeria.

Maquis

The native revolutionary forces in Algeria that fought against French colonialism.

The African Weekly

A populist newspaper in Congo that, while hardly revolutionary, served as a sentinel to warn the colonialist regime of the need for reforms and the inevitability of change.

Sodium pentothal

The so-called "truth serum" used by torturers and others to gain information from unwilling subjects, as was the case in Algeria during the revolution.

Themes

Colonialism as a Disease Vector

Fanon makes the compelling (and then-shocking) case that colonialism is an unhealthy condition for the Algerian because it deprives him of not only economic and social security, education, and a chance at a better life, but more fundamentally because it robs him of his basic humanity. Colonialism as a form of institutionalized violence generates psychiatric illnesses that stem from a complete devaluation of the self, accompanied by various phobias and extreme anxiety states that grow out of violence. In the last chapter, he presents a number of cases of mental disorder directly attributable to colonialism or to the war for independence. A central issue in these psychiatric casualties is the loss of self, of a valid human identity whether through the systematic depersonalization that strips citizens of their humanity each day in a thousand small ways, or through the horrors of torture. Many of these people improved with the taking up of arms against the colonial overlords, and some got better with the passage of time. Fanon's personal radicalization came with the realization that individuals subjected to colonialism who suffered psychiatric illness as a result of that system could only be helped if the obviously sick system itself were changed.

Violence vs. Nonviolence

Although he does not advocate violence, per se, Fanon does characterize it as the inevitable result of a people striving for their freedom after being held in subservience for so many years by a colonial system that is also inherently violent. Unlike the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who advocated a path of nonviolence similar to that promoted by Gandhi in redressing the injustices of British colonialism, Frantz Fanon seems to be more an apostle of Marx and Lenin, who understood that the Russian revolution would be a bloody one as class warfare destroyed the old monarchy and replaced it with communism. Once again, Fanon does not use the word communism to describe the objective of a native rebellion, but he does write in detail about a classless society of equals without discrimination based on sex, skin color, or other circumstances of birth. In a strictly medical sense, Fanon does recognize the cathartic and therapeutic effect of natives overthrowing colonialism by force and violence. He also predicts in detail how the colonial government will respond to violence with more violence, and how the colonialists will at the same time try to break the spirit of the revolution by making small concessions here and there. But he also reminds his readers that they should be suspicious of such moves by the colonialists, remain true to the ideals of their rebellion, and keep fighting until independence is achieved.

Sustaining the Revolution.

In the face of blandishments or concessions made by the colonial government to the rebels, the leaders of the rebellion must undertake a massive campaign of political education so the movement does not stall, according to Fanon. There will inevitably be resistance to sudden, violent change by those who profit from the system—especially the colonialists and natives who have been rewarded for their loyalty to the colonial regime by high-level government jobs and social prestige, Fanon points out. Another step crucial to moving the revolution forward is for the political leaders to move out into the rural areas where there is a solid base of support among the poor peasants who, if asked, are ready and eager to serve as foot soldiers. Whereas the revolution may be hatched in the brains of intellectuals in the cities and towns, its lifeblood—like that of the country itself—is to be found among the simple rural folk who comprise the bulk of the Algerian nation, Fanon says. Once there is a critical mass of support from the lumpenproletariat, the revolution can then move back into the cities and seats of power of the colonialist regime which, by denying them a voice or any satisfaction, help to seal its own fate with the mass of the country. When the rebels have taken power, they need to be mindful of leaving any bureaucrats, bourgeoisie or counter-revolutionary loyalists in power because of the possibility of sabotage. The work of the revolution will continue long after the arms are laid down as the rebels go to work to achieve the justice, equality and prosperity they fought for, according to Fanon.

Style

Perspective

Dr. Frantz Fanon brings an excellent perspective to the writing of this book—that of the psychiatrist who has tried to relieve the mental suffering of black Algerians affected by French colonialism. His perspective as a black man and as a physician gives him instant credibility to address these issues; his lucidity of thought and grace of expression allow him to present them in instructive, compelling prose.

The author maintains an almost clinical objectivity as he describes the colonialist system, the resentment of the natives, how that resentment affects their lives as well as the lives of the colonialists, and the various manifestations of human behavior that become inevitable once the rebels decide to take action for their own independence. It is fascinating to observe how this psychiatrist describes the dynamics of personalities and groups of people as the process of change begins. Fanon is adept at pointing out how people's conscious and unconscious motives, their fears and resistance to change, affect behavior.

In physical medicine, clinicians who treat patients apply the state of the art and science of medicine to relieve disease and suffering of individual patients. When these tools are applied to large populations and diseases that affect many people, it is known as epidemiology. Frantz Fanon may be one of the very first psychiatrists to see a connection between individual mental disease and social-political conditions. This book is his attempt to use that perspective to reach as broad an audience as possible in calling for mass societal and political changes—not unlike the epidemiologist who vaccinates large populations against malaria, for example.

Tone

There is an unmistakable tone of anger, or even outrage, in *The Wretched of the Earth*. As the reader learns about the conditions that give rise to the author's anger, it seems completely justified. The inhumanity of the colonialists, the fear and cowardice of the black bourgeoisie, the tribal rivalries of the natives, and the failure of rebel leaders to articulate a clear vision and to educate the masses about the need for revolution draw Frantz Fanon's ire. At the same time, there is an undertone of urgency about the need for change, not only in Algeria but throughout the Third World. These combine to shake the reader out of his or her comfort zone, to thrust the issues of poverty, exploitation, degradation and injustice into the reader's consciousness so that the reader, along with the author, feels a sense of outrage and a need for justice. This approach is very effective in driving across his message, as this book continues to be read not just for its historical significance but as a blueprint for change in Third World countries and anywhere people struggle for their human dignity.

Structure

It is debatable whether the organization of *The Wretched of the Earth* is the most effective way for the author to make his case—compelling though it is in any event. The book, which is really a sociopolitical analysis and manifesto for change, begins straightaway with Frantz Fanon's dissection of the ills of French colonialism in Algeria, generalizes them to all of the Third World, and offers revolution (violent, if necessary) as the prescription. Then it concludes with a discussion of several medical cases from his own psychiatric practice that illustrate how colonialism affects the mental health of colonial subjects. These sequelae include hysteria, sexual and social maladaptations, violence directed inwardly and outwardly, and suicide.

Because his medical experience treating the casualties of the colonial regime is what opened Fanon's eyes to the injustice perpetrated on the least powerful and most vulnerable ("les damnes"), and because this experience is the foundation for his social and political theories, it would perhaps make an even more compelling argument to open the book with this chapter than to place it at the end. In that manner, the reader would be introduced to the problem through the eyes of a physician, a healer, and be able to empathize with those whose lives are crushed and mangled by colonialism before being introduced to Dr. Fanon's regimen for healing those injuries.

In addition, the book might reach more potential sympathizers through such a reorganization as the reader would have a better foundation to understand and accept some of the more strident language that comprises Fanon's manifesto for change. Once the reader can understand the problem in personal and human terms and empathize with the real suffering involved, the reader would likely be more prepared to accept and embrace the sweeping changes in consciousness and societal organization called for by Fanon.

Quotes

"You do not turn any society, however primitive it may be, upside down with such a program [decolonization] if you have not decided from the very beginning, that is to say from the actual formulation of that program, to overcome all the obstacles that you will come across in so doing" (37).

"In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counselors and 'bewilderers' separate the exploited and those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action, maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge" (38).

"The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up, and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crime in North Africa" (52).

"This idea of compromise is very important in the phenomenon of decolonization, for it is very far from being a simple one. Compromise involves the colonial system and the young nationalist bourgeoisie at one and the same time. The partisans of the colonial system discover that the masses may destroy everything. Blown-up bridges, ravaged farms, repression and fighting harshly disrupt the economy. Compromise is equally attractive to the nationalist bourgeoisie who since they are not clearly aware of the possible consequences of the rising storm, are genuinely afraid of being swept away by this huge hurricane" (62).

"The people make use of certain episodes in the life of the community in order to hold themselves ready and to keep alive their revolutionary zeal. For example, the gangster who holds up the police set on to track him down for days on end, or who dies in single combat after having killed four or five policemen, or who commits suicide in order not to give away his accomplice—these types light the way for the people, form the blueprints for action and become heroes" (69).

"Diplomacy, as inaugurated by the newly independent peoples, is no longer an affair of nuances, of implications, and of hypnotic passes. For the nation's spokesmen are responsible at one and the same time for safeguarding the unity of the nation, the progress of the masses toward a state of well-being and the right of all peoples to bread and liberty. Thus it is a diplomacy which never stops moving, a diplomacy which leaps ahead, in strange contrast to the motionless, petrified world of colonization" (78).

"In all armed struggles, there exists what we might call the point of no return. Almost always, it is marked off by a huge and all-inclusive repression which engulfs all sectors of the colonized people. This point was reached in Algeria in 1955 with the 12,000 victims of Phillippeville, and in 1956 with Lacoste's instituting of urban and rural militias" (90).

"In the colonial territories, the proletariat is the nucleus of the colonized population which has been most pampered by the colonial regime. The embryonic proletariat of the towns is in a comparatively privileged position. In capitalist countries, the working class has nothing to lose; it is they who in the long run have everything to gain. In the colonial countries the working class has everything to lose; in reality it represents that fraction of the colonized nation which is necessary and irreplaceable if the colonial machine is to run smoothly" (109).

"The fact is that in guerrilla warfare the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the place where you are going" (135).

"Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of the trumpets" (147).

"Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe" (154).

"The Western bourgeoisie, though fundamentally racist, most often manages to mask this racism by a multiplicity of nuances which allow it to preserve intact its proclamation of mankind's outstanding dignity. The Western bourgeoisie has prepared enough fences and railings to have no real fear of the competition of those whom its exploits and holds in contempt" (163).

"One of the greatest services that the Algerian revolution will have rendered to the intellectuals of Algeria will be to have placed them in contact with the people, to have allowed them to see the extreme, ineffable poverty of the people, at the same time allowing them to watch the awakening of the people's intelligence and the onward progress of their consciousness" (188).

"As for we who have decided to break the back of colonialism, our historic mission is to sanction all revolts, all desperate actions, all those abortive attempts drowned in rivers of blood" (207).

"Finding your fellow countrymen sometimes means in this phase to will to be a nigger, not a nigger like all other niggers but a real nigger, a Negro cur, just the sort of nigger that the white man wants you to be. Going back to your own people means to become a dirty wog, to go native as much as you can, to become unrecognizable, and to cut off those wings that before you had allowed to grow" (221).

"A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries

should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on" (233).

Topics for Discussion

1) Why does Frantz Fanon accept—if not advocate—violence as an inevitable tool for social change as compared with, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King who embraced the principle of non-violence?

2) What is the crucial element in a successful native rebellion against colonialism that is often overlooked in the early stages of an uprising?

3) What does Frantz Fanon see as the role of the church, or organized religion, in the case of a popular rebellion?

4) What does Fanon identify as the forces that would restrain a colonial government from an all-out military destruction of an armed civilian rebellion?

5) Why do revolutionary leaders such as Fidel Castro of Cuba and Nikita Kruschev of the USSR effect a persona of barely tamed violence in public places such as the UN?

6) Before an actual armed rebellion erupts in a colony, what are some of the sociological and medical signs and symptoms of deep unrest?

7) What are some of the signs that, during and after a rebellion, there is a therapeutic effect on the mental and physical health of the natives?

8) How is the reader to understand Fanon's repeated use of the word "nigger" in this book?

9) Does Fanon believe that a native rebellion against colonialism, or any form of oppression, will always follow the same path? Or does he believe that such an uprising will follow different courses in different cultures?

10) To what extent did American black militants of the 1960s, such as the Black Panthers, adopt and use Fanon's ideas and strategies, if not his rhetoric?

11) Do Frantz Fanon's ideas about oppression, powerlessness, and their resulting influence on mental and physical health have any bearing on American society today? If so, what are the political implications?

12) Would it help contemporary readers of *The Wretched of the Earth* to have another preface written by a contemporary political figure such as Angela Davis to explain the relevance of the book to today's world?

13) Although he often uses terms such as bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat, Fanon is careful never to refer to himself or his ideas as communist. Does it seem to you that, with or without the label, that is precisely what he advocates? Or is it some form of enlightened socialism that values and protects the rights of the individual similar to those of people living in a democracy?