

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF FRANTZ FANON

Instructor: Dr. Neil Roberts
University of Toronto
Wed, 10 AM-12 PM
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POL484H1/2026H1 Winter 2023
Muzzo Family Alumni Hall Room 103
Student hours: Th, 1-3 PM (virtual) & by appointment
(in-person, virtual). Office: Sidney Smith Hall 3118

Course description:

Martinican psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary Frantz Fanon was among the leading critical theorists and Africana thinkers of the twentieth century. Fanon ushered in the decolonial turn in critical theory, a move calling on those both within and outside of Europe to challenge the coloniality of the age and to forge a new vision of politics in the postcolonial period. This course is an advanced seminar devoted to a comprehensive examination of Fanon's political thought. We will begin with an analysis of primary texts by Fanon and end by considering how Fanon has been interpreted by his contemporaries as well as activists and critical theorists writing today.

Course requirements:

Students are expected to participate in class regularly and complete the readings listed on the course syllabus. I will generally begin each class summarizing briefly the previous session's main points, and shall proceed to lecture for a portion of time about the current day's topic. As this is a seminar, you should be prepared to engage in full class discussion, close textual examination, and small group activities.

The following requirements serve as the basis for course evaluation:

- (1) Participation (**30%**): includes (a) weekly Ideas in the World Quercus posts, (b) contributions to in-person and virtual class discourses, and (c) leading 1 class discussion with partner/s on the session's material.
- (2) Two 7-page essays (**40%**)
- (3) Final research paper. Undergraduates: 12 pages. Graduate students: 15-20 pages (**30%**)

Required readings available for sale and on library reserve:

- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, *Revised 2008 edition*)
- Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press)
- Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (Grove Press)
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, *Revised 2021 edition*)
- Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Harcourt)
- Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minnesota)
- Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana: The Indispensable Overcoming of the Black Condition* (Rowan & Littlefield International)
- Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (California)
- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke)

Useful works on Fanon that are available via the library and online:

- Anthony Alessandrini, ed., *Frantz Fanon* (Routledge)
- Anthony Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics* (Lexington)
- Kathryn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding, eds., *Translating Fanon Across Continents and Languages* (Routledge)
- Stefan Bird-Pollan, *Hegel, Freud Fanon* (Rowman and Littlefield)
- Erica Burman, *Fanon, Education, Action: Child as Method* (Routledge)
- Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (Cornell)
- Drucilla Cornell, *Today's Struggles, Tomorrow's Revolutions: Afro-Caribbean Liberatory Thought* (Rowman and Littlefield)
- John Drabinski, "Frantz Fanon" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- Patrick Ehlen, *Frantz Fanon: A Spiritual Biography* (Crossroad)
- Joby Fanon, *Frantz Fanon, My Brother* (Lexington)
- Nigel Gibson, ed., *Living Fanon* (Palgrave Macmillan)
- Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce, *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics* (Rowman and Littlefield)
- Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said* (Fordham)
- Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee White, eds., *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Blackwell)
- Elizabeth Hoppe and Tracey Nicholls, eds., *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy* (Lexington)
- Peter Hudis, *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades* (Pluto)
- Joy James, "'Concerning Violence': Frantz Fanon's Rebel Intellectual in Search of a Black Cyborg"
- Leswin Laubscher, Derek Hook, and Miraj Desai, eds., *Fanon, Phenomenology, and Psychology* (Routledge)
- Christopher Lee, *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Ohio)
- David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (Picador)
- George Ciccariello-Maher, *George, Decolonizing Dialectics* (Duke)
- Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality"
- Achille Mbembe, *The Critique of Black Reason* (Duke)
- David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford)
- Alejandro J. De Oto, *Frantz Fanon: The Politics and Poetics of the Postcolonial Subject* (Rowman and Littlefield)
- Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Duke)
- Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism: Africentric Essays* (Routledge)
- Sylvia Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be Black"
- Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (Monthly Review)
- Students who read French are encouraged to consult regularly the original French editions of Fanon's key works: *Peau noire, masques blancs*, *Les damnés de la terre*, *Pour la révolution africaine*, and *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*. All the works have been republished in a single volume: Frantz Fanon, *Oeuvres* (La Découverte).

Documentaries and Film:

- Cheikh Djemaï (director): *Frantz Fanon: Sa Vie, Son Combat, Son Travail*
- Isaac Julien (director): *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask*
- Göran Hugo Olsson (director): *Concerning Violence*
- Hassane Mezine (director) *Fanon: Hier, Aujourd'hui*

Plagiarism detection:

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays (short papers and final paper) to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation web site:

<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>.

Additionally, usage of Artificial Intelligence (IT) technology including, by not limited to, ChatGPT to compose your assignments is not allowed and shall also be considered plagiarism.

Any case of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of Academic Integrity. Penalties for plagiarism usually range from failure on the assignment to failure in the course and repeat offenses can lead to expulsion. More information about plagiarism can be found at: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Course policies and resources:**Attendance:**

It is paramount for you to attend the sessions in order for all of us to best be able to discuss and decipher the course materials and lectures. However, I will not take attendance roll call in any of the sessions following our initial meeting.

Quercus:

Quercus shall be used for course announcements, readings, and online responses. Aim to check it frequently each week for new information or announcements.

Ideas in the World responses:

For 9 weeks in the semester, each student is required to submit a written response between *at least 275-300 words* on the course Quercus site. In your response, you are to describe how at least one of the assigned texts pertains to current events or debates. These responses are intended to help you process your views on the assignments and begin intellectual conversations with peers that will continue into our class discussions. ***All responses are due by 11:59pm Eastern Time the day *before* class (by Tuesday night).*** Only responses posted

by this time will count for the week's reading and participation. *Ideas in the World responses cannot be made up.*

I will monitor the posts regularly, but not participate. No responses are due in weeks that you submit the final version of a larger writing requirement.

How to Post Ideas in the World responses and other asynchronous responses to Quercus:

- 1) Go to q.utoronto.ca and log in with your username and password.
- 2) Click on this course and then the specific Discussion Forum—within the Discussions section—listed by the Week for which you will be posting a response.
- 3) Click on the Reply icon and enter your response, making sure to include a Subject heading for your post at the top of the entry.
- 4) Click Post Reply to Forum.

Workload:

In addition to the 2 hours we spend together during our weekly class meeting times, you should expect to spend on average at least 10 hours per week on the academic and creative work related to class. If you find that you are spending considerably more (or considerably less) time to engage with this course academically, please contact me so that we can determine the best course of action as you approach the materials.

Writing Centres:

This course will require you to develop your writing skills. You are encouraged to seek out additional guidance from the writing centres on campus.

For information on writing resources and how to sign up for individual appointments, see: <https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/>.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

The staff members of Accessibility Services (located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th floor, suite 400) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations.

Please call 416-978-8060 or email accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Inclusivity and Classroom Culture:

The University of Toronto community embraces diversity of age, background, beliefs, ethnicity, race, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and other visible and nonvisible categories. I welcome all students in this course and expect that all students contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment. If you feel that you are not being welcomed, included, or accepted in this course, please arrange to speak with me or a university administrator to share your concerns.

Recording of Virtual Class Sessions:

Should we have to record a class session during the semester (e.g. a virtual class), recordings of the virtual lecture session will be held within the context of this course and archived and posted to Quercus to support access to course content by all students. These resources are intended to be used as a student study aid and are not a substitute for participation.

Video recordings will primarily capture the instructor and onscreen content. Students will not be visible on video recordings unless their webcam is enabled. Your voice, however, may be captured as an audio recording if you ask a question in class. The same holds true for questions posted in the chat tool. Please speak to me if you have any concern about your image, voice or text being recorded, to determine if alternative means of participating are possible.

Course videos may not be reproduced, posted, or shared anywhere other than the official course Quercus site and should only be used by students currently registered in the course. Recordings may be saved to students' laptop for personal use.

Students may not create additional audio or video recordings without written permission from the instructor since recordings will be provided for all lectures. Permission for such recordings will not be withheld for students with accommodation needs.

Public Lectures and Guest Speakers:

Throughout the semester there will be several public lectures, workshops, and conferences connected to topics in our course, and there may be guest lecturers who will join us during our class time. I shall announce guest lecturers and events after the semester begins.

Respect for Classmates:

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights, and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. UofT does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Academic Integrity:

Students must adhere to the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). You are responsible for ensuring that you do not act in such a way that would constitute cheating, misrepresentation, or unfairness, including but not limited to, using unauthorized aids and assistance, impersonating another person, or committing plagiarism. For more information see [U of T Academic Integrity](#) website.

Academic integrity includes understanding appropriate research and citation methods. If you are uncertain about this, please seek out additional information from the instructors or from other institutional resources including the following:

- This tip sheet provides clear and helpful information about appropriate academic citation: <http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/citing>
- Before handing in assignments students can also review the academic integrity checklist provided by the UofT Centre of Teaching Support and Innovation.

Acknowledgment of Territory:

I wish to acknowledge—and invite you all to acknowledge too—the land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this institution’s meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Schedule of readings by week:

INTRODUCTION: FANON’S BIOGRAPHY, DECOLONIAL CRITICAL THEORY, AND THE PROJECT OF RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL THOUGHT IN DARK TIMES

Week 1 January 11 (first class)

Course Overview

Lewis Gordon, “Fanon, Frantz”
Neil Roberts, “Fanon, Frantz (1925-61)”

PART I: EXAMINING FANON’S PRIMARY TEXTS

Week 2 January 18

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Week 3 January 25

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Recommended: Fanon, *The Drowning Eye* and “Part II: Psychiatric Writings,” in *Alienation and Freedom*

Week 4 February 1

- **Screen on your own: *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask***

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (selection, Quercus)

Recommended: “Part III: Political Writings” and “Frantz Fanon’s Library,” in Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*; Sartre, “Black Orpheus” (in *Race*, Quercus)

***Paper 1 (material through Week 4):
E-copy due via Quercus Tuesday February 7 by 11:59 pm Eastern***

Week 5 February 8

- *No Ideas in the World* response in week 5.

Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (selection)

Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (selection)

Recommended: The Battle of Algiers

Week 6 February 15

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*: including West intro., Bhabha foreword, Sartre (preface)
Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason (Vol. 1)* (short selection, Quercus)

READING WEEK: NO CLASS ON 2/22)

Week 7 March 1

- **Screen on your own: *Frantz Fanon: Sa Vie, Son Combat, Son Travail***

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Aimé Césaire, *And the Dogs Were Silent* (selection in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry*, Quercus)

Week 8 March 8

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (additional selection)

Recommended: Fanon: Hier, Aujourd'hui

***Paper 2 (material from Weeks 5 through 8):
E-copy due via Quercus Tuesday March 14 by 11:59 pm Eastern***

PART II: CRITICAL READINGS OF FANON'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**Week 9 March 15**

- *No Ideas in the World* response in week 9.

Anne McClintock, "Fanon and Gender Agency" (in *Rethinking Fanon*, Quercus)

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*: chs. 1, 2 (Quercus)

Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, intro. & ch. 1 (Quercus)

Recommended: Joy James, "The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal" (Quercus)

Week 10 March 22

- **Screen on your own: *Concerning Violence***
- ***By Friday March 24*: students are to submit to me a final paper proposal. I welcome a 1-on-1 meeting to discuss the document.**

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (entire)

Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*

*Recommended: Gavin Arnall, *Subterranean Fanon*; Neil Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom" (Quercus); Audre Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus**

PART III: FANON'S RELEVANCE TODAY**Week 11 March 29**

Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*

Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*

Lewis Gordon, *Fear of Black Consciousness*: prologue, intro, chs. 1,2, 7, 10

*Recommended: Moon-Kie Jung and João Costa Vargas, eds., *Antiblackness*; Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics*; Olúfémi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation**

Week 12 April 5 (last class)

- *Last week for Ideas in the World responses.*

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*

Nigel Gibson, ed., *Fanon Today* (short selection)

First half of class: peer-review, discussion on final papers.

Second half of class: examination of assigned reading.

Recommended: Jane Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*; Frank Wilderson, *Afropessimism*

****Final paper: E-copy due via Quercus
Monday April 10 by 11:59pm Eastern****

Journals:

- *American Political Science Review*
- *Canadian Journal of Political Science*
- *Caribbean Journal of Philosophy*
- *Caribbean Studies*
- *The C.L.R. James Journal*
- *Contemporary Political Theory*
- *Critical Philosophy of Race*
- *Du Bois Review*
- *Interventions*
- *Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*
- *Journal of Black Studies*
- *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*
- *Journal of Political Philosophy*
- *Karib*
- *Philosophy and Social Criticism*
- *Political Theory*
- *Polity*
- *Radical Philosophy*
- *Small Axe*
- *Theory & Event*

E-Resources:

- Fondation Frantz Fanon: <http://fondation-frantzfanon.com/>
- The Frantz Fanon Blog: <http://readingfanon.blogspot.com/>
- Caribbean Philosophical Association: <https://caribbeanphilosophy.org>
- CODESRIA: <http://www.codesria.org/>