

Editorial

Colin Grant

Throughout my early adulthood at medical school in the 1980s, I had never heard of the revolutionary Martinique-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, author of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), both classics of anti-colonial literature which have inspired generations of thinkers, activists and writers.

Occasionally, I'd pop into Freedom Press, the radical bookshop on Whitechapel Road, but it's unlikely I'd have picked up a book with the title *Black Skin, White Masks*. As the child of black Jamaican migrants, I was drilled in not drawing attention to myself, in not foregrounding my blackness. Fanon's book would have seemed too on the nose for me then, too embarrassing. I didn't want to accept the possibility of my blackness being more of a stain than a simple birthmark, or to consider that I might be a damaged victim of colonial history.

I'm drawn to Fanon now. I admire him because of his fierce, uncompromising intellect, his charm, his cunning and his support for Algerian rebels in their fight against French colonisers in the 1950s. Undoubtedly, a kind of black pride features in my empathy towards Fanon and the recognition of his fearless and uncomfortable truth-telling from which white people, and sometimes black people, also recoil.

The origin of the title *Black Skin, White Masks*, which echoes the quest by black people to mask their differences from their former colonial masters, is grounded in themes explored in the text. These themes include the desire to eloquently match the coloniser's language; an examination of the patronising tendency of his medical colleagues to mimic the pidgin French of their patients when treating them; and the damage to the psyche of black people from the perils of interracial love.

In this edition, ten writers explore Fanon's legacy, his radical work as a psychiatrist, his literature, and his commitment to the fight against colonialism – all part of a remarkable life that came to an end when he died from cancer at the age of just 36.

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Colin Grant's books include *Bageye at the Wheel*, short-listed for the Pen Ackerley Prize, and *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation*, a BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week. His latest book is *I'm Black So You Don't Have to Be*. His oral history of migration to Britain, *What We Leave We Carry*, will be published in June 2026. Grant is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and director of *WritersMosaic*, an online magazine and division of the Royal Literary Fund. He also writes for a number of newspapers including the *TLS*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The New York Review of Books*.

A recording of this piece can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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