Writing at the cusp of phenomenology, psychiatry, and political philosophy, Frantz Fanon’s work attempts to articulate the ambivalent and painful terrain of racialization. A precursor to critical philosophy of race as well as decolonized psychiatry, Fanon brings to light the structuring work of racism, its imaginary dimensions, and its experiential and agential effects. The philosophical traction of Fanon’s work—and its methodological promise for critical philosophies of race—lies in this multidimensional analysis of racism. At once poignant and provocative, Fanon’s work allows us to think racism—and its intertwining with colonialism—in structural, systemic and phenomenological, lived and felt ways.

Fanon (1925-1961) was a phenomenologist and psychiatrist, as well as an anti-colonial militant and thinker. His work was written in dialogue with contemporary existential phenomenologists (especially Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Fanon develops what I would call a “critical phenomenology”: his phenomenology interweaves descriptions of first-person experience, with deconstructions of the intersubjective racial imaginary that undergirds his social world, and analyses of historical, social and economic structures. This approach refuses to treat racism as merely accidental to settler colonial societies, or as mere individual failing. It challenges the epistemology of ignorance (Charles Mills)—or colonial aphasia (Ann Stoler)—of supposedly “race-neutral” philosophical categories. And it poses the questions: How can racism be structuring of being, while historically contingent? How is racialization, at once, social pathology and “aberration of affect”? And what would it mean to “decolonize” being?

In this seminar, we will read closely Fanon’s major phenomenological work, Black Skin, White Masks. And we will aim to read a significant part of his last book, The Wretched of the Earth.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [*Peau noire, masques blancs*]
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [*Les damnés de la terre*]

Where relevant, other articles will be posted to MyCourses.

The English translations of Fanon’s texts are available in Paragraphe Bookstore. *Students with reading knowledge of French are strongly encouraged to read Fanon in the original French* (because both English translations of *Black Skin, White Masks* have their failings); you can purchase these yourself online or at French bookstores in Montreal. I will reference the page numbers in both the French and English versions in class.
Registration Note

Seminars are open to graduate students and to undergraduates in U3 or higher. If you are an undergraduate and would like to take this course, please contact the professor for permission. (For undergraduates, there is a form to fill out and a requirement that you have a CGPA of 3.3 or higher.)

Prerequisite for undergraduate students: PHIL 474, 475, 442, or by permission of the instructor. In addition, knowledge of critical philosophy of race or critical race feminism is desirable for undergraduate students taking the seminar.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

The grade will depend on the following: a major term paper, 60%; a mandatory paper proposal (5%); weekly questions (15%); and consistent and engaged participation in the class as well as regular attendance, 20%.

(1) The **TERM PAPER**, worth 60% of your grade, should be approximately 15-20 pages in length (closer to 15 pages for undergraduates; closer to 20 pages for graduate students). Formatting should be: Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced. The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors. It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you should consult secondary sources for the purpose. *The paper will be due at the end of the term (date TBA)*.

(2) **Topic Proposal** (5%): Comments will be given in person. Submission of the topic proposal is mandatory.

(3) **Short Weekly Questions/Reflections** (15%):

You should come to all weeks of class with one short written question/concept/reflection, designed to generate discussion. You should be ready to contribute this orally, if there is a lull in discussion or when called on. Questions will not be individually graded, but I ask that you hand them in at the end of each class; I will grade them at the end of term taken as a whole. (As a rough guideline, short weekly questions should be about 75-100 words in length.)

Hints: The aim is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of the reading; rather it is to interrogate as precisely and attentively as possible an issue in that week’s reading that you think is significant for understanding the text. Questions/concepts/reflections must be clearly formulated and elaborated in light of the text we are reading. (Please motivate your question by referring to passage(s) from the text, but avoid linear summaries of the text.)

(4) Since this is a discussion-based seminar, ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION are crucial to your role in the seminar. Together they are worth 20% of your grade.

**Expectations with respect to Participation and Attendance**

It is your responsibility as a member of this graduate seminar to come to each class, having done the readings and prepared for substantial and nuanced discussion. **You are expected to attend all sessions of the seminar** (unless you have a valid medical reason for absence).

You are expected to engage seriously with the questions, interventions, and presentations of your fellow students. Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.
**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

Please note that this schedule is flexible. We will be reading the text closely and slowly, and we will take more time as needed.

January 8  
Class cancelled (Professor is at a conference)

**Black Skin, White Masks [Peau noire, masques blancs]** (8 sessions)

January 15  
Introduction
Begin Chapter 1 “The Black Man and Language” [Le Noir et le langage]

22  
Chapter 1 “The Black Man and Language” [Le Noir et le langage]

29  
Chapter 2 “The Woman of Color and the White Man” [La femme de couleur et le Blanc]
Supplementary: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Anti-black femininity and mixed-race identity: Engaging Fanon to reread Capécia”; and William Paris, “Humanism’s Secret Shadow (Fanon and Spillers).” (MyCourses)

Chapter 3 “The Man of Color and the White Woman” [L’homme de couleur et la Blanche]

February 5  
Chapter 4 “The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized” [Du prétendu complexe de dépendance du colonisé]

12, 19  
Chapter 5 “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” [L’expérience vécue du Noir]
[Supplementary: Jean-Paul Sartre, “Black Orpheus”]

TBA Rescheduled make-up class for the week of February 19th (Wed, Thurs, or Fri).

26  
Chapter 6 “The Black Man and Psychopathology” [Le Nègre et la psychopathologie]
Required reading: Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist” from Women, Race, and Class; and William Paris on Fanon and Spillers, TBA (MyCourses)

March 4-8 is reading week

March 12  
[Please note that this class may need to be cancelled]
Chapter 7 “The Black Man and Recognition” [Le Nègre et la reconnaissance]
Chapter 8 “By Way of Conclusion” [En guise de conclusion]

**The Wretched of the Earth [Les damnés de la terre]** (4 sessions)

March 19  
We will begin with Chapter 5 “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” [“Guerre coloniale et troubles mentaux”]
March 26  Chapter 1 “On Violence” [“De la violence”]

April 2  Chapter 2 “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity” [“Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité”]

TBA. Rescheduled make-up class for the week of April 1st (ideally April 3):

Chapter 4 “On National Culture” [“Sur la culture nationale”]
And Fanon’s Conclusion.
[Supplementary: Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre]
And “Racism and Culture”, pp. 31-44 [“Racisme et culture”, pp. 37-52].

TOPIC PROPOSALS are due in class on March 26. Appointments for all students are mandatory to discuss topic proposals on April 2 and 3. [Please sign up on the google-sheet that will be circulated.] Since the professor is out-of-town for most of April, this will be your chance to discuss your final papers in person. The professor will, however, be available on email and by phone.

TERM PAPERS will be due at the end of the semester. Date to be announced.

Scheduling Note: Two classes may need to be rescheduled during term. We will decide rebooking dates together. Please confirm with the instructor that you can attend these dates.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

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