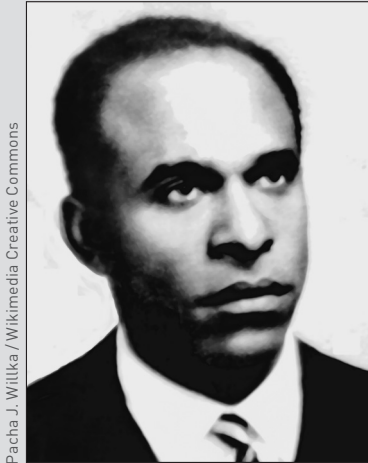


## FRANTZ FANON

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



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Frantz Omar Fanon was born on July 20, 1925, in Fort-de-France, the capital of the French colony of Martinique. Though the descendent of African slaves, his family was middle class and relatively well off. In 1943, Fanon left Martinique to fight for the French in World War II. According to biographer David Macey (2012), the war introduced Fanon to his first overt experiences of racism. Though, as a colonial possession, Martinique always had been organized along racial lines, during the war, when occupied by French naval crews, it became overtly racist. For example, lineups for rationed food were racially segregated (Macey, 2012:83). Fanon also encountered racism in France where “French girls backed away in fear when black soldiers asked them to dance” (Macey, 2012:103), and, in the army, which was organized by racial hierarchies.

After the war, entitled to a free university education, Fanon took up medicine, and specialized in psychiatry. He studied in Lyon, France, where he was involved in student government and anticolonial protests (Macey, 2012:123). On his own time, Fanon read psychology and philosophy, occasionally attending lectures by phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Macey, 2012:124). Merleau-Ponty’s influence, as well as the influence of existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, are evident in Fanon’s discussion of the body, freedom, and consciousness in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In 1952, Fanon married Marie-Joséphine (Josie) Dublé and published his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. *Black Skin, White Masks* combined autobiographical experiences and literary materials to describe the psychopathological effects of colonialism on colonized subjects.

Fanon graduated in 1951, and passed the exams to become a psychiatrist in 1953. His first (and only) posting as a psychiatrist was in Blida, Algeria (Macey, 2012). Before coming to Algeria, he had spent two years studying with François Tosquelles at the psychiatric hospital in Saint-Alban, France. Where the education at Lyon had been conservative, and focused on biological treatments, Tosquelles practiced “institutional psychotherapy” (Macey, 2012:148). This perspective placed mental illness in a social context and, as part of treatment, relied upon community engagement, occupational therapy, and group work. Fanon aimed to develop this approach at the hospital in Blida.

The Algerian War of Independence began in November 1954, when bombs went off in the Algerian capital of Algiers. The war was led by the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its military wing, the National Liberation Army (ALN). Their goal was the liberation of Algeria from French colonial rule. At first, already sympathetic to anticolonial projects, Fanon helped by providing refuge for, and treating, wounded FLN fighters at his home and in the hospital (Macey, 2012:300). In 1957, fearing that his support for the FLN was known to French officials, Fanon resigned from his hospital job (2012:297). He was exiled from Algeria, and went to Tunis, where the FLN had established its headquarters. In Tunis, Fanon started to edit and write for the FLN’s newsletter. He also became the international spokesperson for the FLN and, eventually, the ambassador in Accra, Ghana, for the Provisional Government of the Algerian

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