“Hand in Hand”: Fanon, Existentialist Ethics, And the Problem of Other People

For Employee Name

Month DD, 20XX

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop




Marion, Ind
Aug. 1930.

I. A Century of Revolution

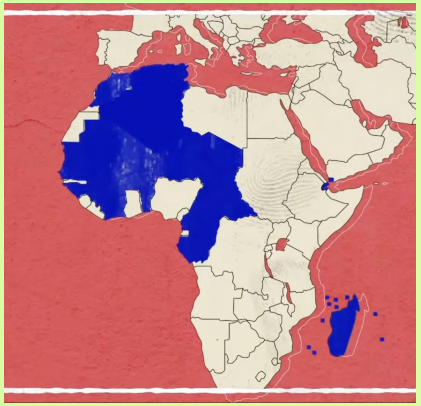


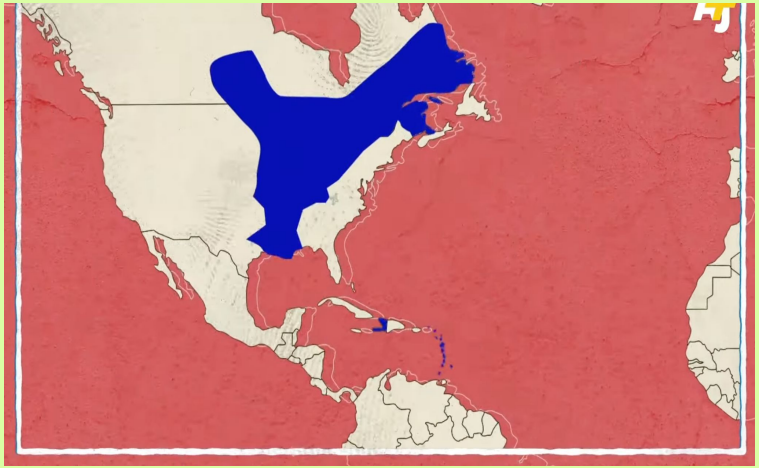












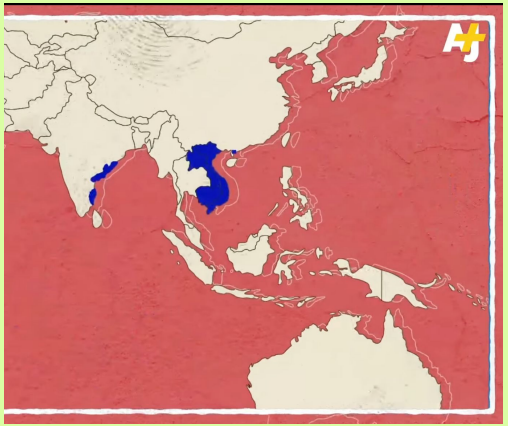

















Photo: Shane T. McCoy / U.S. Navy



Group No. 2 — After torture by electricity

In this batch we have grouped the Algerian patriots who have been mainly tortured by electricity. Whereas electricity was once just one method of torture in a series, from September 1956 onward certain interrogations were conducted exclusively with electricity.

Psychiatric Symptoms Encountered

a. Local or systemic somatic delusions: Three cases

These patients feel pins and needles throughout the body and get the impression their hands are being torn off, their heads are bursting, and they are swallowing their tongue.

b. Apathy, lack of will, and loss of interest: Seven cases
These patients suffer from apathy, a lack of motivation and energy, and live from day to day.

c. Phobia of electricity

Fear of touching a light switch, fear of switching on the radio, fear of using the telephone. Absolutely impossible for the doctor to even mention the possibility of electroshock treatment.

Two feelings frequently emerged in this first batch of tortured victims:

First of all, *that of injustice.* Having been tortured day in and day out for nothing seems to have broken something in these men. One of these martyred victims had a particularly painful experience: After several days of unsuccessful torturing, the policemen came to realize they were dealing with a peace-loving individual who had nothing to do with any of the FLN networks. In spite of this conviction a police inspector reportedly said: “Don’t let him go like that. Work him over a bit more so that when he gets out he’ll keep quiet.”[31]

Secondly, *an indifference to any moral argument.* For these patients there is no just cause. A tortured cause is a weak cause. The first thing to do is to increase one’s power and not pose the question of the merits of a cause. Power is the only thing that counts.

Case No. 5—A *European police inspector tortures his wife and children*

R — —, thirty years old, referred himself to us of his own free will. He is a police inspector who for some weeks realized that "something was wrong." Married with three children. Smokes a lot: three packs a day. He has lost his appetite and his sleep is disturbed by nightmares. These nightmares have no particular distinguishing features. What bothers him most is what he calls his "fits of madness." First of all he does not like to be contradicted: "Doctor, tell me why as soon as someone confronts me, I feel like hitting him.

He can't put up with noise. At home he has a constant desire to give everyone a beating. And he violently assaults his children, even his twenty-month-old baby.

But what frightened him was one evening when his wife had bitterly protested he was being too hard on the children (she had even said to him: "For goodness sake, you're crazy. . .") he turned on her, beat her, and tied her to a chair shouting: "I'm going to teach you once and for all who's the boss around here."

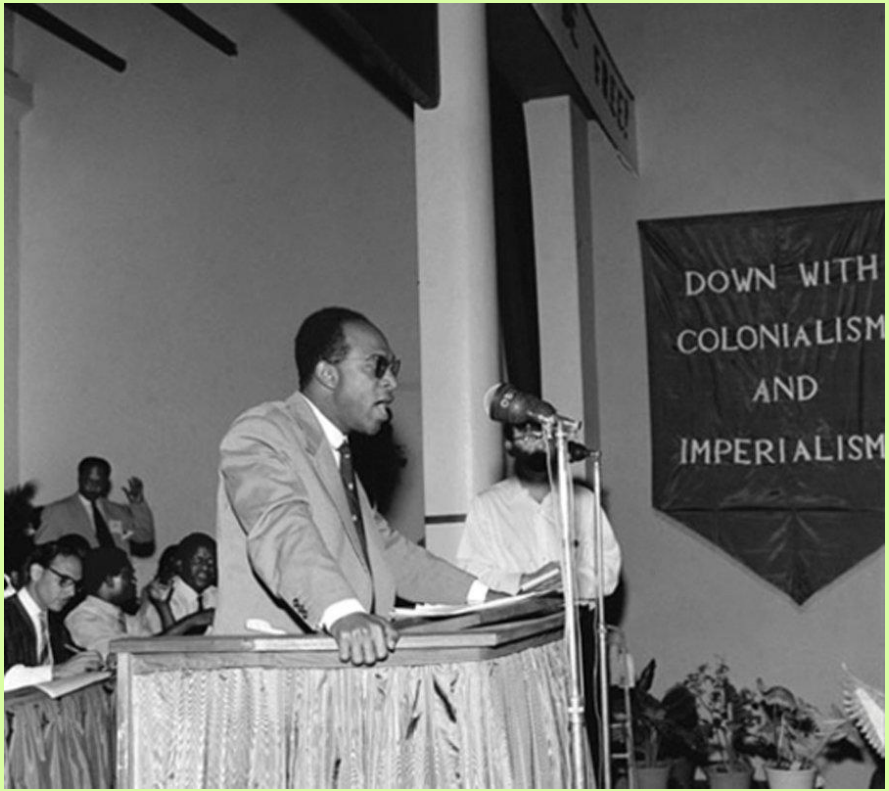
Algeria, and when they realize it, it'll be too late. The thing that gets me the most is the torture. Does that mean anything to you? . . . Sometimes I torture for ten hours straight."

"How does torturing make you feel?"

"It wears you out, of course • . . It's true we take turns, but the question is knowing when to let your colleague have a go. Everyone thinks he's just about to get the information and is careful not to hand over the customer all nice and ready for the other guy to take all the glory. So sometimes we hand him over and sometimes we don't.

"We even offer the guy money, our own pocket money, to get him to squeal. Our problem is, are we able to get the guy to talk? It's a matter of personal success; we're sort of competing. We eventually messed up our fists. So we

though he tried to blame everything on "the troubles." As he had no intention of giving up his job as a torturer (this would make no sense since he would then have to resign) he asked me in plain language to help him torture Algerian patriots without having a guilty conscience, without any behavioral problems, and with a total peace of mind.[25]


DOWN WITH
COLONIALISM
AND
IMPERIALISM



II. An Existentialist Diagnosis of Colonialism

Existentialist Theory of Good Living

1. Life is fundamentally structured by unresolvable ambiguities that bring strife/tension.
2. Value, and its pursuit, makes those tensions meaningful and worth living.
3. Values are neither absolute nor independent of particular human experiences of something as valuable.
4. The experience of something as valuable is produced through human projects, which are themselves the product of free consciousness.
5. Consciousness is free in that it is a) experienced from the inside, b) unbound by a determining essence, and c) always radically open to alternative possibilities.
6. This freedom can be evaded or suppressed, which renders value inaccessible.

Existentialist Theory of Good Living, II

7. Your freedom is only experienced as freedom when it is recognized by another freedom whom you recognize as recognizing you.

8. Freedom is not isolation but the experience of belonging-to a collective constituted by things that are “free-like-me”.

Is [existentialist] ethics individualistic or not? Yes, if one means by that it accords to the individual an absolute value and that it recognizes in him alone the power of laying the foundations of his own existence....But it is not solipsistic, since the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others.

–Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Conclusion

The adventurer always meets others along the way; the conquistador met the Indians….every Don Juan is confronted with Elviras. Every undertaking unfolds in a human world and affects men…

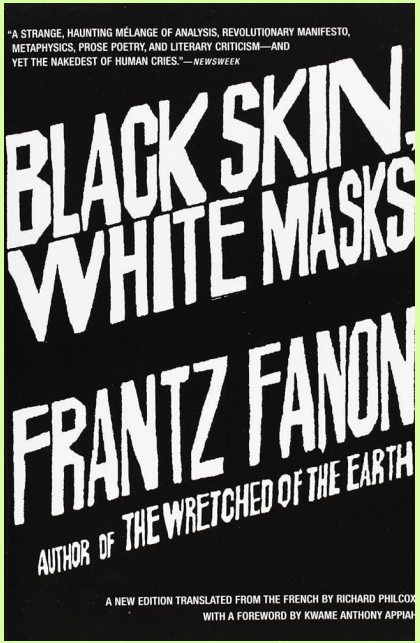
Two attitudes are possible. He can become conscious of the real requirements of his own freedom, which can will itself only by destining itself to an open future, by seeking to extend itself by means of the freedom of others…Beyond the rejected [absolute] is found an [authentic] [absolute]. But the man who acts in this way…no longer deserves the name of adventurer.

The man we call an adventurer, on the contrary, is one who remains indifferent to the content, that is, to the human meaning of his action, who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into account that of others…the massacre of the Indians meant nothing to Pizarro; Don Juan was unaffected by Elvira’s tears.

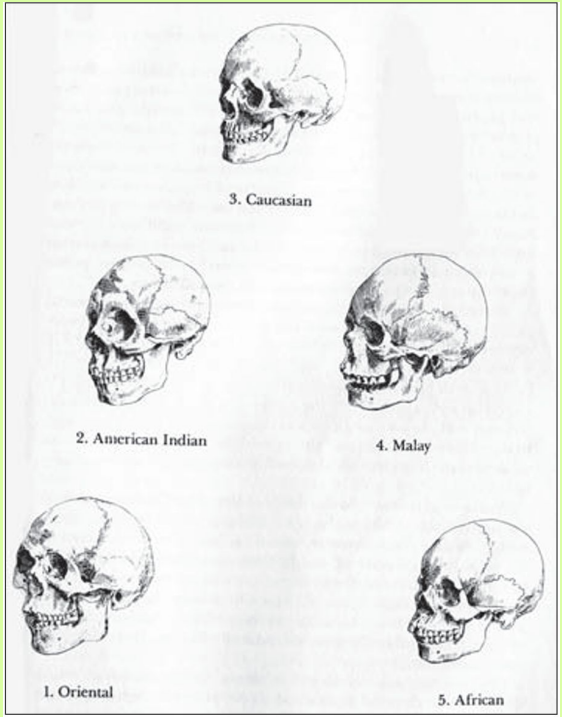
Dirty Negro!” or simply “Look, a Negro!”

I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects.

Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitudes, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation…Nothing doing. I explode.

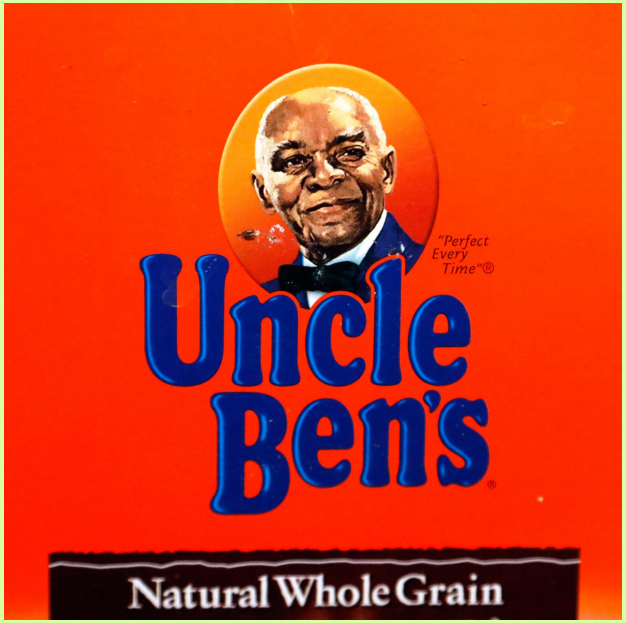





3. Caucasian
2. American Indian
4. Malay
1. Oriental
5. African

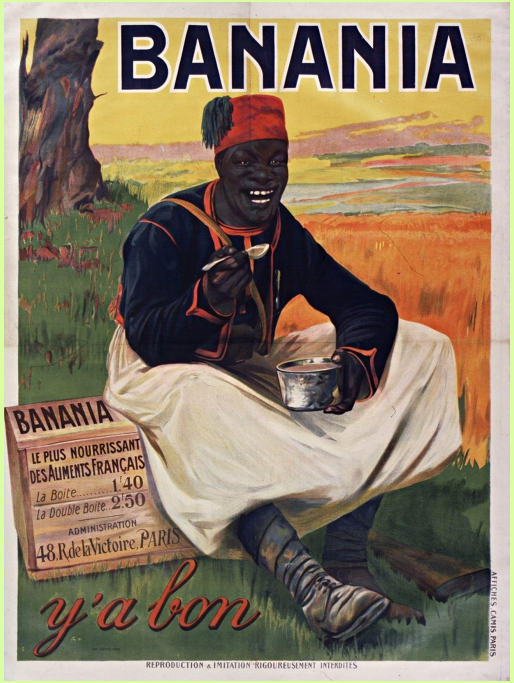





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I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania*.

–Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* Ch. 5

“Dirty Negro!” or simply “Look! A Negro!”

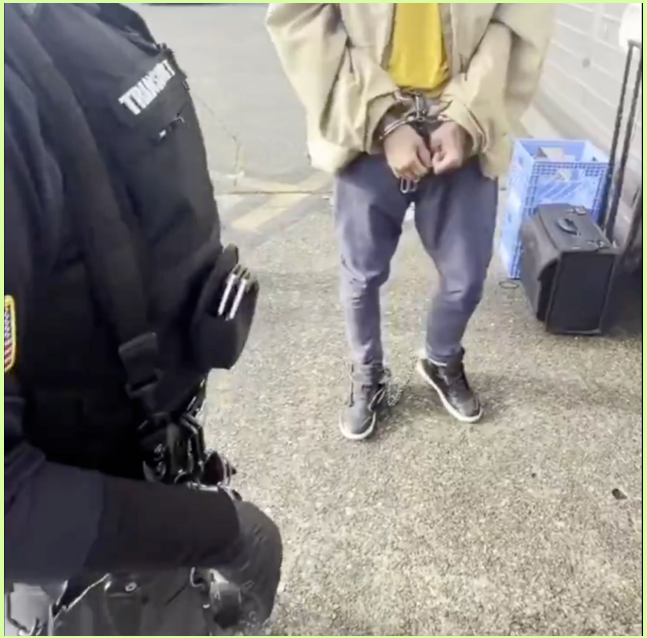
“Look! A Negro!” It was a passing sting. I attempted a smile. “Look! A Negro!” Absolutely. I was beginning to enjoy myself. “Look! A Negro!” The circle was gradually getting smaller. I was really enjoying myself. “Maman, look, a Negro; I’m scared!” Scared! Scared! Now they were beginning to be scared of me. I wanted to kill myself laughing, but laughter had become out of the question.

“Look, a Negro! Maman, a Negro!” “Ssh! You’ll make him angry. Don’t pay attention to him, monsieur, he doesn’t realize you’re just as civilized as we are.” My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look, a Negro; the Negro is trembling, the Negro is trembling because he’s cold, the small boy is trembling because he’s afraid of the Negro, the Negro is trembing with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother’s arms: “Maman, the Negro’s going to eat me.”









III. Towards Living Authentically With Others

“Look how handsome that Negro is.”

“The handsome Negro says, ‘Fuck you,’ madame.”

Her face colored with shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I had identified the enemy and created a scandal. Overjoyed. We could now have some fun.

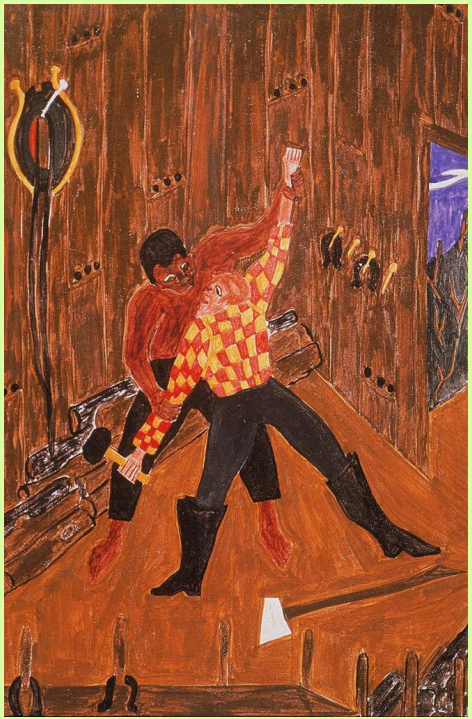
The battlefield had been drawn up. I could enter the lists.



We would not be so naive as to believe that the appeals for reason or respect for human dignity can change reality. For the Antillean working int he sugarcane plantations in Le Robert, to fight is the only solution. And he will undertake and carry out this struggle not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger.



...Having a gun is the only chance you still have of giving a meaning to your death...



Slavery shall no longer exist on French soil.
The upheaval reached the black man from the outside. The black man was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled about him in a colorful dance. The upheaval did not differentiate the black man.

VS

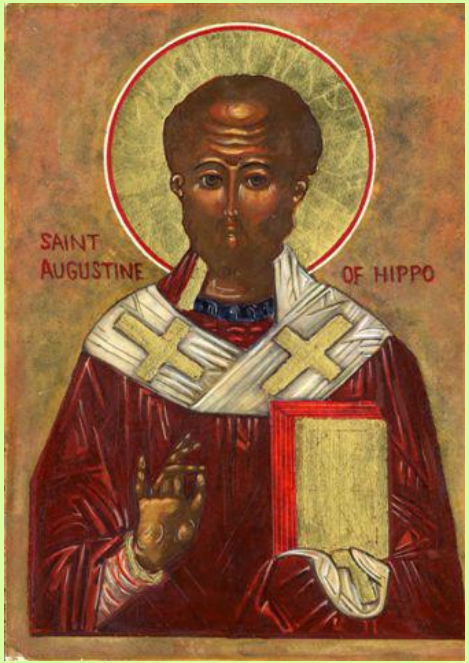
In the United States, the black man fights and is fought against. The twelve million black voices have screamed against the curtain of the sky…On the battlefield…a monument is slowly rising…and at the top…I can already see a white man and a black man hand in hand…







The discovery that a black civilization in the fifteenth century does not earn me a certificate of humanity…Above all, let there be no misunderstanding. We are convinced that it would be of enormous interest to discover a black literature or architecture from the third century before Christ. We would be overjoyed to learn of the existence of a correspondence between some black philosopher and Plato. But we can absolutely not see how this fact would change the lives of eight-year-old kids working in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe.



It is not because the Indo-Chinese discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. Quite simply this was because it became impossible for them to breathe, in more than one sense of the word.









[A friend of mine] enlightened me…on the serenity with which the sixteen-or seventeen-year-old Vietnamese fell in front of the firing squad. Once, he told me, we had to kneel down to fire…

Seen from Europe, such things are incomprehensible. Some people claim there is a so-called Asian attitude toward death. But nobody is convinced by these third-rate philosophers…

The Vietnamese who die in front of a firing squad don’t expect their sacrifice to revive a forgotten past. They accept death for the sake of the present and the future.



Oh my body, forever make me one who questions!

