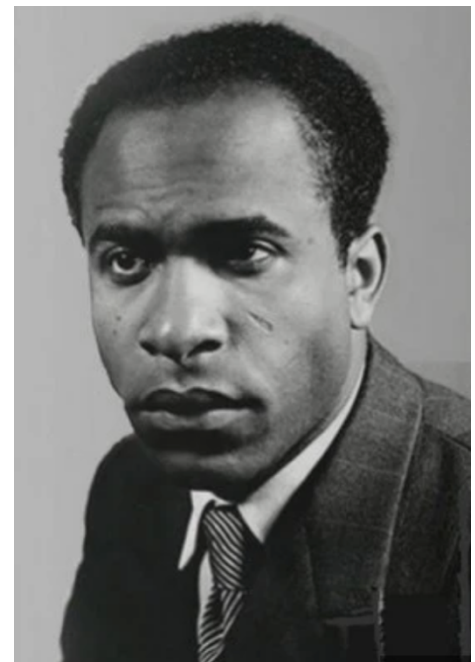


Frantz Fanon

In the 1960s many nations, especially in the Caribbean and Africa, which had been colonies of the UK and France became independent. While the mainstream US press often presented the politics of the newly independent Caribbean and Africa as a contest between capitalism and communism, many Caribbean and African intellectuals and political leaders saw themselves as advocating a humanism which they saw as opposing all rigid ideologies.

One of the most prominent black intellectuals of the period was Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). Born on the French Caribbean island of Martinique, Fanon received his doctorate in psychiatry in France. In 1952 he published *Black Skin, White Masks*, an account of the damage colonialist ideology inflicts on black people. On the first page of the book he proclaims his goal to be Fanon - "Striving for a New Humanism." On the last page of the book he concludes:

Fanon - "I, a person of color, want but one thing:
May humans never be instrumentalized. May the subjugation of person by person - that is to say, of me by another - cease. May I be allowed to discover and desire humanity wherever it may be. The black person is not. No more than the white person. Both have to move away from the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication can be born. Before embarking on a positive voice, freedom needs to make an effort at disalienation. At the start of life, a human is always congested, drowned in contingency. The misfortune of humans is that they were once a child. It is through self-consciousness and renunciation, through a permanent tension of freedom, that humanity can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not try simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other? Was my freedom not given me to build the world of *you*, human? At the end of this book we would like the reader to feel with us the open dimension of every consciousness. My final prayer. O my body, always make me a person who questions!"



Frantz Fanon

Fanon's work as a French psychiatrist in Algeria during the war of liberation there led to his second book *The Wretched of the Earth*, which continues the argument of his earlier book. After reviewing the many problems of European culture, he concludes.,

"For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new humanity."

He continues to be very widely read.

Walter Rodney

Born in the colony of British Guiana, Walter Rodney (1942-1980) was a talented scholarship student who received a Ph.D. in history from the University of London in 1966. Rodney first became well known while teaching in Jamaica in 1966-68. Rodney looked to Fanon's humanism as an alternative to Christianity, Orthodox Marxism, and pure identity politics, all of which Rodney suspected of being prone to manipulation by colonialism.

While individual Christian missionaries may have had noble intentions, Rodney has no use for imported Christianity in general.



Walter Rodney

Rodney - "The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders, and soldiers. There may be room for arguing whether in a given colony the missionaries brought the other colonialist forces or vice versa, but there is no doubting the fact, that missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light. The imperialist adventurer Sir Henry Johnston disliked missionaries, but he conceded in praise of them that "each mission station is an exercise in colonisation."

Most Caribbean radical intellectuals of the early twentieth century were Marxists. By the 1960s, Rodney and others had become disillusioned with mainstream Marxism. Rodney cites C.L.R. James, George Padmore and other revolutionaries who had been alienated by, for example, the British Labour party's support for British colonialism. Rodney wrote:

Rodney - "Time and again, James found his white Marxist comrades reneging on their internationalism when it came to the cause of the Black man - be it Ethiopia, the West Indies or the U.S.A. The only course of action compatible with the welfare of African peoples was to break with such compromised crypto-racist whites, as Padmore did, as Sekou Toure did, as Aime Cesaire did. Africans on the continent do not find this course of action hard to follow. There is already a built-in suspicion of "foreign" ideologies which can be carried to irrational lengths but which at least serves as a barrier to accepting white ideological hegemony of any sort. The progressive African who is conscious of what the Christian missionaries did is unlikely to be taken in by Marxist missionaries."

Rodney was hostile to all forms of dictatorship. From 1964 to 1985 Guyana was ruled by Forbes Burnham, a dictator who justified his rule by citing his African ancestry. Rodney believed that a black dictator could reproduce the worst features of white colonialism, even down to the schoolbooks. In 1979 Rodney wrote:

Rodney - "Hitler's megalomania was backed by the powerful German economy and the might of the German army. Burnham's megalomania is closer to comedy and farce. It takes the form of wearing a General's uniform and hoping that the army will conquer his own people. In the long

run, however, every dictator is like any other dictator. Burnham certainly has the capacity to make life miserable for the entire population of our small nation.

"Like all classic dictatorships, that which exists in Guyana has fostered the cult of the personality. The minority PNC regime has used all manner of tricks and gimmicks to make the "Comrade Leader" appear to be a demi-god. Some of the gimmicks were inherited from our past of colonial oppression. Thus on the exercise books of school children, the face of the reigning English Monarch was simply replaced by that of the Prime Minister, even though there is a President as Constitutional Head of State in Guyana."

The above words were clandestinely published in Guyana in 1979. By 1979, Rodney was widely known and could have easily taken a faculty job in the US or elsewhere. He chose to live in Guyana and organize opposition to the dictatorship. In June 1980, Forbes Burnham had Walter Rodney killed. Recently declassified documents from the US document that Burnham had received funding from the US CIA, as Rodney suspected.

For Rodney, race is an unfortunate, but real, social construct. Rodney uses the word "black" to describe whichever ethnic group is oppressed in a particular situation. For example, in Jamaica in 1968 Asian Indians were "black", Chinese people were "white", and the many Jamaicans who identified as mulatto could be anything, depending on circumstances. Rodney believed that once the power of capitalism was broken, race would be obsolete.

Rodney - "Black Power is not racially intolerant. It is the hope of the black man that he should have power over his own destinies. This is not incompatible with a multiracial society where each individual counts equally. Because the moment that power is equitably distributed among several ethnic groups, the very relevance of making the distinction between groups will be lost."

Humanist Marxism

Rodney, Fanon, and many others of their period believed in what was called "Humanist Marxism". This was an effort to include Marx's insights, especially into the nature of capitalism, while rejecting Marxism's "scientific" theories which were at best dehumanizing and in practice were associated with dictatorships oppressing people in the name of Marxism.

Humanist Marxists found support in some of Marx's earliest writing, before Marx embraced the "science" of "dialectical materialism". The young Marx identified atheism and communism as practical applications of humanism, writing in 1844:



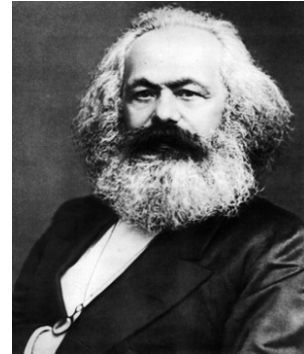
Humanist Marx, Age 22

Marx - "Atheism, being the removal of God, is the advent of theoretic humanism, and communism, as the removal of private property, is the justification of real human life as man's possession and thus the advent of practical humanism... Only through [removing alienation] does positively self-deriving humanism, positive humanism, come into being. But atheism and communism are no

flight, no abstraction; they are not a losing of the objective world begotten by humanity— of humanity's essential powers given over to the realm of objectivity; they are not a returning in poverty to unnatural, primitive simplicity. On the contrary, they are but the first real coming-to-be, the realization become real for humanity, of humanity's essence— of the essence of humanity as something real."

Enthusiasm for the young Marx was not confined to Fanon, Rodney and other black intellectuals. Much of the sixties "new left" in the US shared their interest.

Many orthodox Marxists pointed out that Marx's youthful enthusiasm for humanism didn't last long. They argued that the true, mature Marx would have regarded humanism as bourgeois sentimentality.



Marx, the "scientist", Age 60