



## Peter Hudis. Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades

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To cite this article: Jonathan Fell (2016) Peter Hudis. Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades, Asian Affairs, 47:3, 475-476, DOI: [10.1080/03068374.2016.1225891](https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2016.1225891)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2016.1225891>



Published online: 24 Oct 2016.



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**Peter Hudis.** *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades*. Pluto Press, London, 2015. pp. vi + 165. Illust. Notes. Index. Pb. £12.99. ISBN 9 7807 4533 6251

In this learned and passionate articulation of Frantz Fanon's life and work, Peter Hudis investigates the extent to which Fanon's thinking can guide us towards a new humanity in a context of racial prejudice and injustice. Hudis argues that global society has regressed since the promise of liberal democracy, which followed the collapse of Statist Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1991 and decolonisation long before then. Rather than embracing values of openness, tolerance and equality he believes we continue to live in a world (or a Western world anyway) plagued by racial profiling and discrimination, which he sees as an inescapable symptom of 21<sup>st</sup>-century capitalism. Clearly, there is a problem to be solved and Fanon, as one of the foremost thinkers on the subject of race during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is perhaps the man to help us solve it in the eyes of Hudis.

Fanon (1925–1961) was born in Martinique and became a radical left-wing thinker who provided influential writings on decolonisation theory which had an impact in Africa, Asia and the wider world. Hudis posits that we should look to Fanon in addressing modern-day racism because his entire life work was geared towards establishing or restabilising the humanity of people of colour in the face of it. He emphasises Fanon's multi-faceted approach to this challenge through his work as a philosopher, political activist, psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist, in such monumental works as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*. It is both the breadth and particular aspects of Fanon's influences that, in Hudis's eyes, make him such a potent source for solving modern-day issues of race. The book is in large parts focused on expounding Fanon's relationship with the various academic schools and theorists that he drew from in order to form his own input into questions of black identity and critical race studies. It is here that Hudis comes into his own, revealing a deep and erudite understanding of not only the schools of thought that Fanon engaged with, namely Marxist concepts of alienation, Hegel's 'master/slave' dialectic, Maurice Merleau Ponty's theories of phenomenology, among others, but the way in which Fanon appropriated and adapted them in accordance with the problems he sought to address. Hudis navigates these two areas with ease, shedding new light on the roots of Fanon's thought and the way in which he revised and redeployed them for his own use, perhaps acting as a nifty insinuation as to how present-day thinkers

can adopt and reshape Fanon's thinking in order to address and overcome racism today.

What is most clever about Hudis's exploration of Fanon's relevance to race relations in the modern world is that he chooses to conduct it within the framework of a biography. This is key because Fanon's theories of race are profoundly influenced by ideas of phenomenology, which argues that knowledge and understanding should be based on our lived experiences rather than idealism or empiricism. Therefore, in order to truly grasp Fanon's perspective on race, we must develop an intimacy with his life experiences as related by Hudis within the book. It is only through a familiarity with Fanon's everyday, individual existence that we can fully appreciate his point of view on race. A serendipitous benefit to this is that we learn about Fanon as an individual and the context in which he existed, adding personality and nuance to what is in most parts an academic delineation of Fanon's thought. Above and beyond, what Hudis so clearly illustrates in his writing of this book is that Fanon's relevance to the problem of racism today is such because he was one of the foremost thinkers on the subject during the last century. In the words of Hudis himself: "it is precisely because we are not past the racism of the last century that we are not past Fanon; instead we seem to be colliding into him, all over again."

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2016.1225891>