

### Activity 9. Wretched of the Earth (1961)

**Background:** Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist from Martinique, a French colony in the West Indies. He was working in a mental hospital in Algeria during the Algerian War for Independence. As a psychiatrist he studied the impact of colonialism on colonized people. Fanon concluded that the use of violence to overthrow injustice was justified to break the emotional oppression caused by colonialism. Fanon's work was widely cited in defense of struggles to achieve national independence. These selections are from the section "Concerning Violence" in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (<http://www.openanthropology.org/fanonviolence.htm>, accessed January 11, 2010).

**Instructions:** Your first task as a group is to rewrite Fanon into language you are more familiar with. By translating these passages you will grapple with understanding their meaning. Once this is completed, list one main idea for each of the sections. Your final task is to respond to Fanon's argument that colonial oppression is a form of violence and justifies a violent response.

A. Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon . . . the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists . . . in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonized. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another "species" of men and women: the colonizers. (35-36)

B. The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. This reign of violence will be the more terrible in proportion to the size of the implantation [settlement] from the mother country. The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime . . . However, the results are not equivalent, for machine-gunning from airplanes and bombardments from the fleet go far beyond in horror and magnitude any answer the natives can make. (88-89)

C. In all armed struggles, there exists what we might call the point of no return. Almost always it is marked off by a huge and all-inclusive repression which engulfs all sectors of the colonized people . . . Then it became clear to everybody, including even the settlers, that "things couldn't go on as before." (90-92)

D. For the colonized people this violence . . . invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. The groups recognize each other and the future nation is already indivisible. (93)

E. The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history . . . During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression; after national liberation, they are called upon to fight against poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment. (93-94)

F. Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries: Latin America, China, and Africa. From all these continents, under whose eyes Europe today raises up her tower of opulence [wealth], there has flowed out for centuries toward that same Europe diamonds and oil, silk and cotton, wood and exotic products.

Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples. The ports of Holland, the docks of Bordeaux and Liverpool were specialized in the Negro slave trade, and owe their renown to millions of deported slaves. (102)

### **References**

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