Carter Woodson and Frantz Fanon: Radical Educators and Humanists

SHADI NEIMNEH
MARWAN M. OBEIDAT
The Hashemite University, Jordan

We must elevate the people, expand their minds, equip them, differentiate them, and humanize them. … To be responsible in an underdeveloped country is to know that everything finally rests on educating the masses, elevating their minds, and on what is all too quickly assumed to be political education. … But political education means opening up the mind, awakening the mind, and introducing it to the world.

Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

If you can control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.

Woodson, The Miseducation of the Negro

I. Introduction

The apparently incongruous two epigraphs cited above have much in common. They share an explicit awareness of a politicized education that can be used to uplift or conversely ensnare man. In each epigraph, education is presented as a means of social control, a ploy in a Foucauldian game of power/knowledge relations. It is also viewed as a means of sociopolitical praxis. Frantz Fanon and Carter Woodson – black intellectuals whose writings reveal a concern with the impact of a legacy of colonialism, racism, and slavery on the people of African descent – address themselves to man in his general, human state; hence, they refer to “the people,” “the masses,” and “man.” While Woodson’s epigraph clearly establishes educational practices as a
potential means of degrading man and limiting his possibilities, Fanon’s epigraph necessarily concedes this and highlights the humanizing, enlightening role education can play. This paper attempts to explore and complicate the educational stance of these thinkers. It endeavors to show that their educational stance is rooted in their humanism, an interest in improving the condition of the oppressed people as well as the human condition. In this regard, Woodson’s pedagogical stance is more easily accessible than Fanon’s. Woodson was more of a historian and educator than a political thinker. He observed and worked in schools and universities inside and outside America. History for him was a broad term that covers the social, economic and political aspects of life. Fanon was more of a psychiatrist and a political theorist on race relations, decolonization, and neocolonialism. Therefore, Woodson’s approach to education was culturally oriented in the most part while Fanon’s was more politically oriented.

Education and humanism, broad concepts as they are, are essentially intertwined in the thought of these thinkers. Both revolve around man, and they are originally meant to celebrate such concepts as universalism, justice, progress, creativity and freedom while ensuring the development of man’s potential. Both, as theoretical approaches, are expected to directly improve the human condition at different levels.

The two thinkers explore the role of the native-black intellectual elite in countering internalized racism and prejudice and improving the lives of the masses. They are yet aware that such intellectuals may well perpetuate feelings of inferiority and contribute to the subordination of their people by being complicit with the oppressors. Fanon and Woodson draw on their diverse experiences as black intellectuals produced by Western educational systems. Woodson, an African American historian and educator, received degrees in history from Harvard University and the University of Chicago, while Fanon, a Martinican thinker, studied medicine and psychiatry in France and received early colonial schooling in Martinique, a French colony then. Woodson is known as the “Father of Black History” and holds a unique position in early 20th century American history. He published books and articles on the contributions and the status of African Americans in American history. He also founded many organizations for the uplift of the “Negro” race and wanted “Negroes” to be proud of their heritage and Americans to acknowledge the contributions of “Negroes” to American, and world, history and culture. Woodson was
reacting to the lack of representation or misrepresentation of his people in American history and curricula. On the other hand, Fanon wrote as an anti-colonial thinker. His interests covered ethnicity, sexuality, nationalism, linguistics, anthropology, and psychopathology. Fanon thought his French education and personal merits would eliminate colonial racism and stereotypes. He saw himself as a French subject for a while and served in the French army during World War II. He writes about the Antillean “Negro” from Martinique and the African intellectual receiving a French colonial education, whereas Woodson primarily writes about the Eurocentric education African Americans receive in white institutions. In each case, colonial/hegemonic education is viewed with doubt as it instills inferiority and teaches imitation rather than creativity and critical thinking.

It is important to note that Woodson and Fanon’s views on education are part of their larger cultural concerns like race relations between blacks and whites, (neo) colonialism, cultural alienation, cultural hegemony, and the exploitation of the oppressed. They see education as one element in the larger sociopolitical life they aim at improving. However, they both believe that education, if used effectively, can mobilize the masses and bring about radical social changes. Their actual experiences with colonial education taught them the opposite: colonial education was used to foster colonial oppression and enhance exploitation and race prejudice.

Woodson and Fanon are not, to be sure, alone in their belief in the potential of education as a value-laden system. Educators like P. Freire and D. Macedo argue that “[t]here is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to enculturate the young into the logic of the present system, or it is the means of dealing critically and creatively with reality to discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (qtd. in Potts 2003: 174). Freire and Macedo pinpoint the fact that education promotes assimilation and conformity with the status quo or alternatively pits people against social norms by inducing certain transformational changes. Similarly, Potts claims that across all “tracks,” curricula perpetuate oppression by marginalizing voices, histories, values, and experiences of oppressed groups; emphasizing the ‘classics’ and canons of the hegemonic culture; instilling values consistent with the status quo (e.g. individualism, competition, etc.); and ignoring issues such as colonialism and racism (p. 174).

Woodson and Fanon reject such a hegemonic education that perpetuates inferiority and subservience. As they situate their
pedagogical stance within a larger cultural context or a new order that acknowledges the human essence of man, attempts to end his alienation, and tries to restore his equality, they are humanists in education. To some extent, their educational humanism is existentialist. It is not directly driven by religion. It is rooted in lived existence and has affinities with the Enlightenment belief in universal reason as the basis for an improved human life. Their educational humanism shows that man is capable of doing good and evil, and it is the role of education to rectify the human condition. Man is seen as the accomplice and simultaneously the solution. Seen from another perspective, their educational humanism is a Marxist one in that it seeks a revolutionary change. Gibson grants this point when he argues that Fanon “can be considered a Marxist humanist in the sense that he is not championing a static notion of human nature, but a notion of human potential…” (2003: 186). While Fanon and Woodson believe in man’s potential to change the conditions that led to the intellectual and physical enslavement of man, they do not approve of the Marxist notion of class struggle as inherent in all human relations. They seem satisfied with restoring an earlier state of human existence devoid of exploitation and strife.

A comparison between Woodson’s *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933) and Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) reveals much in common about both intellectuals. While they believe in the value of education as a means of affecting a radical break with the colonial and imperial legacy, they are still motivated by a humanistic, ethical stance. In Woodson’s case, this stance is primarily manifested in a multicultural approach to the education of the “Negro” and an earnest desire to restore race pride to his people and see them as an integral part of world history and civilization. In Fanon’s case, the same humanistic stance is apparent in his vision of a better postcolonial Africa achieved through “revolutionary humanism” and in his desire to eliminate stereotypes and feelings of inferiority associated with blackness. The New Negro Movement of the Harlem Renaissance in America and the Négritude Movement in France, which were both operating in the first half of the 20th century, should give us a distant humanistic framework for the works of Woodson and Fanon. Both movements were responses to anti-black racism and white intellectual domination; they celebrated the essential humanity of blacks by trying to restore their equality, cultural heritage, and racial pride. However, neither Woodson can be fully associated with the New Negro Movement, nor Fanon with the
Négritude Movement without some qualification and a context beyond the limited scope of this paper.

Woodson and Fanon expose assimilative education and the hegemony associated with it in the hope that the result will be a healthy black consciousness capable of thriving in the world. They also seek to restore humanity to the people of African descent and help them find a place for themselves in a global culture. This paper sheds light on these two thinkers as theorists of education and humanists. The primary texts by Fanon and Woodson examined reveal a politicized pedagogical stance that is driven by their humanism. The redemptive power of education that they believe in makes them advocates of universal humanism rather than empty or prejudiced political agendas. They view education as a potential avenue for an improved human condition and not as a stimulator of interracial conflicts or alienation. The radical sociopolitical changes they envision seek to right already existing wrongs, and not to create a new order of oppression and domination.

It can be argued that the texts examined carry an ideological and pedagogical weight that gives them value in black studies. And because of their universal value, they can be utilized by non-black educators and humanists for improving human relations. To evade an essentializing critique that reduces Woodson’s works to a fanatic concern with Afrocentrism and Fanon’s works to revolutionary violence, we focus on the way they yoke together humanism and education and how education is constantly viewed as a potential means of useful social praxis.

2. The Miseducation of the Negro: Woodson’s Multicultural Humanism

Woodson, in what seems to be a harsh criticism of “Negro” education, exposes the educational methods which led and deepened the African American’s feelings/consciousness of inferiority. Echoing Fanon’s conception of the slave/master relationship as normalized psychology, Woodson contends that the “Negro” “cannot be a thinking man” because his education normalizes a “slave psychology which causes this preference for the leadership of the oppressor” (1990: 55). Woodson thinks both practical and classical “Negro” education have failed to be effective for improving the lives of “Negroes.” He then suggests that the “Negroes” develop their full gifts and potential. Only an educational system that makes them better individuals, prepares them
to meet the world satisfactorily, equips them for practical tasks, helps them advance and make a good living, and makes them think and do things for themselves can fulfill the desired task. The Eurocentric education of the “Negro,” according to Woodson, has taught him to accept his inferiority and his place in society unquestioningly. It made “Negroes” hate themselves and feel they are a burden. It presented the Negro experience in a negative light and made the white one the universal ideal. For Woodson, such an education is actually “miseducation.”

Woodson thinks that the “traducers” of the race have betrayed it and were complicit with the oppressors. The educated elite alienated themselves from the masses and replicated colonial exploitation. Woodson’s indictment is often directed towards black colleges and universities and the educated “Negro” elite associated with these institutions. He argues that race prejudice is the result of the miseducation of the whites about black history; inferiority, he thinks, is instilled in the “Negroes” because of their miseducation. A humanist in education, Woodson suggests that the “Negroes” reconstruct a creditable past to elevate the race; that whites also be educated about the contributions of blacks to civilization and world history; that the race nurture race pride; and that education develop personalities with critical thinking skills rather than make “Negroes” imitate the white race and nullify their thinking. Hence, Woodson believes that the current educational system should be reconstructed. Good education, he believes, teaches the “Negro” how to be a worthy citizen in the community, make a living, use money wisely, and be unselfish in serving the “Negro” race and humanity. As the “Negro” education failed to achieve a radical break with Western hegemony, Woodson concludes that it is manipulated by the oppressors of the race. Woodson says: “The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them” (1990: 22). This underlying humanistic framework that Woodson is working within gets clearer if we examine his multicultural educational stance.

Woodson’s humanism reveals a multicultural approach to education. His views on education are evidently secularized in that he always relates them to the real life and lived experiences of African Americans hoping that the race can improve its condition among other races. Some critics have noted this humanistic tendency in Woodson’s thought. For example, Thorpe asserts that “Woodson felt that the way
to improve race relations was through education of both American whites and Negroes” (1958: 99). As such, he wanted blacks to be productive citizens in the American society and urged whites to acknowledge the contributions and history of blacks. The fact that he mixes education with culture is clear throughout the book; Woodson touches on issues as diverse as “Negro” politics, religion, economics, medicine, law, and business. It is part of Woodson’s multicultural humanism that he approaches the “Negro” in the different walks of life. A humanist whose project is the elevation of the “Negro” race in world culture is justified to deal with the diverse cultural manifestations of life. Woodson rightly deems education as forming the worldview and the material conditions of human life. He wants his people to be acknowledged by other races and cultures rather than face the “awful fate of becoming a negligible factor in the thought of the world” (qtd. in Wesley 1951: 15). Hence, it is logical that he dedicated his life to “establish Negro history as a recognized and respected field” (Thorpe 1958: 93). He thought educating others about “Negroes” might advance multicultural humanism.

Okafor argues in ‘Multiculturalism in Education: Carter G. Woodson’s Miseducation of the Negro Revisited’ that we can see this book as “a product of what Alan [sic] Locke has described as the New Negro” (1992a: 212). This “New Negro” is supposed to strive for equality and participation in social life and eliminate cultural alienation due to racial belonging. The “New Negro” demands recognition and fulfillment as a human being. While this might be the accessible part in Okafor’s discussion, there is a more problematic part. According to Okafor, Woodson is neither an integrationist believing in the total assimilation of African Americans in the mainstream American culture nor a separatist believing in a separate education for African Americans; Okafor convincingly argues that Woodson is a pluralist in his cultural approach to education, an inference that can be supported by textual evidence as we will see. Okafor writes:

The conclusion that emerges logically from all this is that Woodson is a pluralist... Woodson qualifies as a pluralist because he recognizes that America is not a melting-pot, but rather a country of distinct ethnic/racial/cultural groups. His call for an educational content that is relevant to the needs of African Americans and recognizes the distinct contributions of Black people to human civilization also underscored his pluralist perspective. (Okafor 1992: 212)
However, and after claiming that Woodson is a “pluralist” in education, Okafor goes on to ambivalently argue that in terms of history,

Woodson’s work is Afrocentric, for the Afrocentric theory posits that Africans should be studied as the subject rather than the object of history. Woodson’s pluralist and Afrocentric perspective is also manifested in the fact that he did not desire a different kind of education for Black and White people. Instead he was in favor of what today is described as multicultural education – a curriculum that would include the experiences of the cultural groups that constitute America. (Okafor 1992a: 212; emphasis mine)

Okafor adds, by way of emphasizing Woodson’s Afrocentricity, that the book stands as an Afrocentric work, despite its shortcomings like Woodson’s uncertainty about the Africanity of all Black people. Afrocentricity, as defined by Molefi K. Asante, is the study of African and African American affairs on the basis of the African cultural system. Culture here is applied in a holistic sense, say in the sense in which it was defined by Beverly Bruce as “everything people do the tools that we use, how we lap our environment, the way we live, the way we order our lives, our family structure, our governmental structure, the class systems, the educational system, the religion, the socialization process, etc....” Thus, what people sometimes derisively and erroneously refer to as “the cultural approach” to education is indeed a holistic approach because culture is like a bowl in which everything else – politics, economics, the social system, the educational system, etc. resides. Therefore, those who dismiss Afrocentrists as narrowly-focused culturalists do not know what they are talking about (Okafor 1992a: 212).

Earlier in this article, Okafor forcefully claims that Woodson’s The Miseducation of the Negro “is an Afrocentric and thought-provoking exposition of the consequences of the Great Enslavement and the “slave-master’s” education... on the African American psyche” (1992a: 208). Okafor, hence, easily reconciles Afrocentrism with multiculturalism throughout this article. While we disagree with Okafor’s assertion that this book is Afrocentric, we, on the other hand, agree that it exposes the effects of the legacy of slavery on African Americans’ education. Woodson does express the psychological effects of internalizing feelings of inferiority and dependence fostered by the enslavement of the race. However, Okafor repeatedly associates Woodson with Afrocentrism and defines Afrocentricity on another
occasion as “the doctrine that holds that African people should be studied from their point of view” (p. 208). Okafor cites Molefi K. Asante, the proponent of Afrocentricity of Temple University, as saying that “Afrocentricity seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data” (qtd. in Okafor 992a: 208).

The book, however, is and is not simply Afrocentric. As a book detailing the African American experience in education, it is Afrocentric. Moreover, the book can be seen as Afrocentric if viewed as part of Woodson’s overall oeuvre about the African American in American history. Nevertheless, the book’s argument and underlying import are not Afrocentric. Woodson’s multiculturalism makes as his primary concern not the opposition to a Eurocentric system of education focusing on white experience but rather giving the Negro experience some space in this system. What is problematic about Okafor’s assertions is that Woodson is not unquestioningly an Afrocentrist. Afrocentrism contradicts Woodson’s multiculturalism that Okafor is at pains to prove. Afrocentrism makes Africa the center of the universe and undermines Woodson’s humanistic scheme that is necessarily inherent in his multiculturalism. An educator like Epps lists the goals of pluralistic/multicultural education in humanistic terms and in direct opposition to either Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism: “(1) acceptance of and respect for diverse peoples, (2) self-acceptance and pride in one’s heritage, and (3) acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for community development” (1973: 329). Thus, pluralism in education is inherently implicated in humanism, and not simply Afrocentrism.

Being an Afrocentrist means viewing the world from an African point of reference. While a Eurocentrist negates the experiences of minorities, the Afrocentrist necessarily does the same with the experiences of non-Africans and asserts the African experience as the norm. An Afrocentrist has a limited, probably dogmatic, view about the world and serves only to counter Eurocentrism. Woodson’s multiculturalism necessarily makes him a humanist who embraces a positive combination of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism and cares more about humanity in general. Woodson is enraged by the effects of Eurocentric education on African Americans, but he is writing as a member of a human community rejecting the cultural alienation of the educated “Negro” as it does not help human progress. He argues:
When a Negro has finished his education in our schools, then, he has been equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized white man, but before he steps from the threshold of his alma mater he is told by his teachers that he must go back to his own people from whom he has been estranged by a vision of ideals which in his disillusionment he will realize that he cannot attain. (Woodson 1990: 5-6, emphasis mine)

Woodson’s humanistic stance is clear when he claims that “When you hear a man talking, then, always inquire as to what he is doing or what he has done for humanity” (1990: 118). He questions the foundations of colonialism and Western moral and spiritual bankruptcy in his “new” humanism; he rejects conventional Christianity and morality for a new worldview based on equality and love. He asserts:

The old worn-out theories as to man’s relation to God and his fellowmen, the system of thought which has permitted one man to exploit, oppress, and exterminate another and still be regarded as righteous must be discarded for the new thought of men as brethren and the idea of God as the lover of all mankind. (Woodson 1990: 149-150)

Woodson is also concerned about his people’s contribution to humanity; he argues that “the race is especially in need of vision and invention to give humanity something new” (1990: 138). An Afrocentrist does not invest humanism with such a paramount concern.

Woodson sees in authentic education a means of giving the “Negro” a human status. He argues that “if the Negro is to be elevated he must be educated in the sense of being developed from what he is, and the public must be so enlightened as to think of the Negro as a man” (1990: 136). This humanism in education is rooted in multiculturalism, i.e. pluralism, rather than Afrocentrism. Woodson argues: “Yet we should not take the position that a qualified white person should not teach in a Negro school” (p. 28). Woodson’s multicultural humanism makes him oppose segregation in education to value inclusion, tolerance, and “common sense.” Woodson notes: “Herein, however, the emphasis is not upon the necessity for separate systems but upon the need for common sense schools and teachers who understand and continue in sympathy with those whom they instruct” (p. 28). Continuing in the same multicultural humanistic vein, Woodson writes:
As to whether or not a white man should be a leader of the Negroes, this question can be dismissed as a silly one. What has the color to do with it? Such a worker may be white, brown, yellow, or red, if he is heart and soul with the people whom he would serve. It just happens, however, that most white men now in control of Negro institutions are not of this required type. (Woodson 1990: 126-7)

Thus, Woodson’s conception of leadership is a multicultural, ethical one rather than Afrocentric. He contends: “There can be no reasonable objection to the Negro’s doing what the white man tells him to do, if the white man tells him to do what is right” (1990: 23). Woodson also wants the world to acknowledge the contributions of Africa to world history and culture. He argues: “Yet Africa, according to recent discoveries, has contributed about as much to the progress of mankind as Europe has, and the early civilization of the Mediterranean world was decidedly influenced by Africa” (p. 136). A humanist in education, Woodson wants the contributions and the potential of his race to be appreciated and taught to others. Examining the curricula of Negro colleges, he remarks that “invariably these Negro colleges offer courses in Greek philosophy and in that of modern European thought, but they direct no attention to the philosophy of the African” (p. 137). As a multicultural humanist, Woodson is not objecting to black colleges teaching European thought; he simply wants these colleges as well as the white ones to teach and include the African experience. A multicultural humanist, rather than an Afrocentrist, Woodson advocates inclusion as necessary for appreciating the communal human experience.

Woodson also acknowledges the contributions of white and black men who established schools and churches for the Negro race: “We would pay high tribute also to unselfish Southerners…and to white men of our time, who believe that the only way to elevate people is to help them to help themselves” (1990: 26). When it comes to Negro religion, Woodson offers a secularized, existentialist “humanitarian” view. He argues: “The large majority of Negro preachers of today, then, are doing nothing more than to keep up the medieval hell-fire scare which the whites have long since abandoned to emphasize the humanitarian trend in religion through systematized education” (p. 69). In the absence of religious leadership, Woodson advocates education, and thus man in his human state, as a surrogate redeemer. In addition, Woodson is unhappy with the educated Negroes who alienate themselves from the masses and do not serve humanity. He
contends: “In our time too many Negroes go to school to memorize
certain facts to pass examinations for jobs. After they obtain these
positions they pay little attention to humanity” (p. 56). This apparent
humanism undermines all claims about Woodson’s alleged
“Afrocentrism.”

Within this framework of multicultural humanism, Woodson
advocates a revolutionary change in the “Negro” status in American
history. He argues that the Negro “needs to become radical, and the
race will never amount to anything until it does become so, but this
radicalism should come from within” (1990: 187). Woodson’s
humanism acquires a revolutionary tinge in the name of humanism.
He argues:

Why should the Negro wait for someone from without to urge him to
self-assertion when he sees himself robbed by his employer, defrauded by
his merchant, and hushed up by government agents of injustice? Why
wait for a spur to action when he finds his manhood insulted, his woman
outraged, and his fellowmen lynched for amusement? (Woodson 1990:
188)

This implicit violence that colors his assertion is not uncalled for; it is a
necessary action against an already prevailing injustice. What is
important in this regard is that Woodson entrusts education, and not
mere violence, with inducing a revolutionary, yet humanistic, change.
Woodson asserts: “But can you expect teachers to revolutionize the
social order for the good of the community? Indeed we must expect
this very thing” (1990: 145).

It should be reiterated that Woodson’s primary concern was to
promote “what his race has thought and felt and attempted and
accomplished that it may not become a negligible factor in the thought
of the world” (1990: 190). His efforts to collect, organize, and publish
historical materials about the black race, he thought, would “bring
about harmony between the races through mutual understanding”
(Scally 1985: 10). Critics like Meier & Rudwick also agree that
Woodson tried to bring about harmony among the races (1986: 48).
This multicultural, universal humanism is further emphasized by what
Woodson says of the Negro History Week he inaugurated in 1926: “It
is not so much a Negro History Week as it is History Week. We
should emphasize not Negro History, but the Negro in history. What
we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of
the world void of national bias, race hate and religious prejudice” (qtd.
Woodson devotes a chapter in *MN* for “Negro” leadership. He basically talks about the educated “Negroes” who fail to make use of their education to elevate the race or bring about the required reform. This educated class is actually miseducated because it received its training from a hegemonic, colonial culture and now replicates what it received by miseducating and exploiting others. Many educated “Negroes,” therefore, were complicit in “a plan to enslave the Negroes’ minds” (1990: 116). “Negro” leaders, Woodson argues, have worried about trifles like positions, higher pay, and personal profit. Woodson, in line with Fanon’s critique of the profit-making intellectual leaders in the neocolonial Africa, calls many of the “Negro” leaders “racial racketeers” (p. 119). This “bad” leadership assured “the ultimate undoing of the Negroes in the community” (p. 116). The educated leaders frustrated the expectations of the masses and failed to solve the problems of the race. They did not participate “in the higher things of life” and resorted to “systematized exploitation” (p. 104). Thinking that there is no hope for the masses, they decided “to exploit these people for all they can and use the accumulations selfishly” (p. 125). These intellectual leaders are miseducated as they enhance the colonial structures of domination, distance themselves from the masses, and thus become complicit with the oppressors. Because they accept the presumed inferiority of the black and do not look for a change, they start exploiting and corrupting people by spreading the same ideas. The “Negro” intellectual, according to Woodson, should be a helping hand rather than a liability. Woodson repeatedly exposes this bad leadership for losing its essential humanity. He reasons:

Such leadership, too, has continued into our day and it goes from bad to worse. The very service which this racial toady renders hardens him to the extent that he loses his soul. He becomes equal to any task the oppressor may impose upon him, and at the same time he becomes artful enough to press his case convincingly before the thoughtless multitude. (Woodson 1990: 116)

Woodson concludes that “[t]he race needs workers, not leaders” (1990: 118). The Negro race needs service rather than negative leadership in order to advance, do things for itself, and live abundantly. It is interesting that Woodson relates his conception of “Negro” leadership to his larger project of multicultural humanism by foregrounding the
role of positive leadership, and thus authentic education, in nurturing man’s potential and ensuring his contribution to human civilization. He argues: “Under leadership we have been made to despise our own possibilities and to develop into parasites; by service we may prove sufficient unto the task of self-development and contribute our part to modern culture” (p. 119). Thus, the kind of education that Woodson approves of is a politicized liberation education that repudiates rather than replicates hegemonic structures. Eurocentric education fails to be a means of useful social praxis for “Negroes” or to provide them with the required leadership. It has to be replaced with a multicultural education that improves the lives of all races and acknowledges their humanity and place in world culture. Fanon is also exposing colonial education and offering a politicized version of education necessary for a new “revolutionary humanism.” Fanon is working in line with Woodson. He is writing within a humanistic scheme to expose colonial education and raise a consciousness necessary for a revolutionary change.

III. **Black Skin, White Masks: Fanon between New Humanism and Colonial Education**

In *BSWM*, Fanon draws on his personal experiences and observations as a black man from Martinique in France. The personal is generalized and presented as part of a discourse on humanism. Fanon shows a serious concern about the destructive effects of radicalized differences on the black man’s psyche. Colonial racism, according to him, alienates the black man from himself. Fanon refers to inferiority complex of the black man as partly caused by “the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization of this inferiority” (1967a: 13). He dwells on the effects of internalized racism and negative stereotypes about “Negroes.” These are so prevalent that they form the “Negro’s” consciousness. They imprison him and make him view himself as a racial construct rather than a human being. Hence, Fanon declares that his purpose is to “help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” (p. 30). Moreover, Fanon clearly advocates “a new humanism” beyond narrow Manicheanism and inducts us to “understand and love” (p. 9). This new humanism provides a general framework for *BSWM* and is celebrated by Fanon elsewhere in his writings. Fanon argues he wants that “the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for
me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be” (p. 231). Fanon argues for universalism, understanding, freedom, and equality as the bases for this “new humanism” that frames his whole argument. It is part of Fanon’s new humanism that he sees a solution to the color problem in “[rising] above this absurd drama that others have staged around [blacks]” and “[reaching] out for the universal” rather than the Manichean, stereotypical order that associates blackness with evil (p. 197). A humanist, Fanon sees the Jew as his “brother in misery,” for both are radicalized and segregated (p. 122). Fanon sympathizes with Jews and Arabs subjected to racism and racial stereotypes and sees in them brothers caught in the same situation.

Fanon champions the cause of the exploited and achieves some recognition for his race: “Of course I have talked about the black problem with friends, or, more rarely with American Negroes. Together we protested, we asserted the equality of all men in the world” (1967a: 110). Caute argues that in BSWM, the young Fanon “was still refining and polishing the bright jewel of universal reason which alone could release both oppressors and oppressed from their mutual mystification” (1970: 16). Fanon is for what asserts humanism and against everything that negates or dehumanizes man. He exposes slavery and values freedom and “authentic communication” (1967a: 231). “The disaster of the man of color,” Fanon asserts, “lies in the fact that he was enslaved” (p. 231). This humanistic concern about the recognition of the human essence of man echoes throughout the book. Fanon suggests: “Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?” (p. 231). Fanon’s humanism culminates when he asserts openness to the other and prays for a consciousness that constantly questions the condition of man. Fanon urges and prays: “At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness. My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” (p. 232). Fanon uses the Hegelian dialectic to highlight the notion of reciprocal recognition necessary for the acknowledgement of the humanity of blacks. He says: “I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions” (p. 218).

Fanon presents the problematic of colonial education within this manifest framework of humanism elaborated above. He is concerned with the plight of the educated Antillean Negro as torn between his people and the white man. Fanon, pointing out the gap between the
Shadi Neimeh & Marwan M. Obeidat

Educated Negro and the masses, argues that the “educated Negro, slave of the spontaneous and cosmic Negro myth, feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him. Or that he no longer understands it” (1967a: 16). The “Negro” grows alienated from the masses due to the influence of white culture and civilization that he internalizes via his colonial education. This education becomes an avenue for attaining a human status denied to him because of colonial stereotypes and racism. Before we examine the problematic of colonial education more, let us look at Fanon’s treatment of the role of language in intellectual colonization.

Fanon reasons that blackness, being a Negro and thus inferior, is a cultural construction arrived at through stereotypes and misrepresentation. “[T]he black soul,” Fanon argues, “is a white man’s artifact” (1967a: 16). He also points out the role of language, spoken or written, as a carrier of cultural and ideological messages and as a creator of a worldview. He argues that the Antillean’s “cultural situation” is a linguistic product; it is “a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly – with the help of books, newspapers, schools, and their texts, advertisements, films, radio work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs” (p. 152). As a distorted cultural construct, the “Negro” “has no culture, no civilization, no ‘long historical past’” (p. 34). Therefore, Fanon advocates restoring the native culture in the linguistic form of “the establishment of children’s magazines especially for Negroes, the creation of songs for Negro children, and, ultimately, the publication of history texts especially for them, at least through the grammar-school grades” (p. 148). He seems aware of the role of schools in cultural reform. He is aware that colonial education distorts indigenous culture and alienates natives from it. Language for Fanon is a powerful resource for preserving native culture and countering intellectual colonization.

Colonization in the form of cultural and educational hegemony is hardly a new issue in postcolonial studies. Many critics expose the colonizer’s attempts at colonizing the mind of the native by suppressing the native’s language and culture and promoting those of the colonizer. According to Onwuanibe, “[o]ne of the major aspects of alienation is cultural imposition in the form of language” (1983: 42). Onwuanibe elaborates that language “incarnates and expresses the culture of a people. Since it is a distinctively human quality, the deprivation of language amounts to a deprivation of a person’s humanity” (p. 42). Onwuanibe calls this form of cultural estrangement
effected through language “intellectual alienation” (p. 43). Hence, it is part of Fanon’s humanism that he is exposing this kind of alienation the Antillean “Negro” suffers because of a colonial education that distances him from his language and cultural roots. An alienated consciousness negates man and opposes “the open door of every consciousness” that Fanon wants to be acknowledged and recognized (1967a: 232). The black man, Fanon posits, should feel and be human because he is human, not because he acquires French or imitates whites.

Fanon holds a comparison between the kind of education children receive in France with that children receive in Martinique. The Antillean Negro receives an education that furthers his self-depreciation and makes him seek a white mask. Fanon writes:

The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about ‘our ancestors, the Gauls,’ identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all-white truth. There is identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man’s attitude. (1967a: 147)

The Antillean Negro, in the course of his intellectual colonization, is taught to see his fellow black men as “savages” as opposed to the civilized colonizer. When this education is internalized, “one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. When in school he has read stories of savages told by white men, he always thinks of the Senegalese” (1967a: 148). A humanist in education, Fanon does not approve of teaching such colonial stereotypes to the Antillean “Negro.” He opposes stereotypical imposition on both whites and blacks. He observes: “To impose the same ‘Evil Spirits’ on the white man and on the black man is a major error in education” (p. 148). Fanon is aware that the miseducation of “Negroes” can keep them “the slave of their archetypes” (p. 35). The Antillean takes himself to be white, and not like the “savage” Senegalese he is taught about. While the French children learn about their culture and ancestors, the black children of Martinique do not learn about their history or ancestors. Instead, they learn about the history and ancestors of others, often the French oppressors. Thus, they do not learn to build self-esteem or racial pride. They grow up to feel rootless and dependent on France as the mother country.

If Martinique children are miseducated about their heritage and history, they will not be able to relate to their ancestors’
accomplishments, and will then be trapped in the same circle of inferiority. Fanon, thus, is enraged by the effects of racism on the education of blacks and their psyche. Fanon argues that the educated “Negro” often finds that “he is rejected by a civilization which he has none the less assimilated” (1967a: 93). Education and the French language are the primary means of this assimilation and subsequent alienation. The educated “Negro’s” alienation is multifold: he is alienated from his consciousness as a black man and convinced of his inferiority; he is alienated from his fellow “Negroes” who are uneducated; he is alienated from the white culture he has internalized, and yet now rejects him; and he is alienated from his native language and the worldview related to it.

Fanon underscores the role of language in perpetuating the marginalization and inferiority of the oppressed. A language is the medium of a culture and a promoter of a worldview. Hence, it is a tool in intellectual and cultural colonization. Echoing the future Foucault on power-knowledge, Fanon argues that “[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power” (1967a: 18). The Antillean “Negro” attempts to adopt the language of the colonizer, French, to gain social empowerment and overcome feelings of inferiority complex. Fanon goes on to say that “[e]very colonized people…every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country” (p. 18). The Antilleans of the middle class are colonized by the French language. They try to use French, not Creole, to seem more civilized. Fanon argues: “The middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect. One avoids Creolisms. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it” (p. 20). The teaching of French to the Antillean children leads to its triumph over native dialects. Fanon argues that in the Antilles, “[t]he language spoken officially is French; teachers keep close watch over the children to make sure they do not use Creole” (p. 28).

French is learned as a powerful resource for the “Negro.” It is viewed as the language of civilization and the container of a more advanced culture. It is also viewed as a measure of assimilation, privileged standing, and social influence. Fanon argues: “In any group
of young men in the Antilles, the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is inordinately feared; keep an eye on that one, he is almost white. In France one says, ‘He talks like a book.’ In Martinique, ‘He talks like a white man’” (1967a: 20-21). Creole becomes the language of the inferior and French that of the civilized. Fanon points out that the Antillean who perfects his French becomes “whiter” in a sense. He says by way of exposing cultural assimilation through language: “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” (p. 38). Fanon gives much weight to internalized inferiority and the Negro’s attempts at cultural assimilation via colonial education. He is aware that these attempts at assimilation are often futile, for the “educated Negro suddenly discovers that he is rejected by a civilization which he has none the less assimilated” (p. 93).

The color problem persists and colonial education fails to solve it for the Negro. Fanon argues: “There are many people in Martinique who at the age of twenty or thirty begin to steep themselves in Montesquieu or Claudel for the sole purpose of being able to quote them. That is because, through their knowledge of these writers, they expect their color to be forgotten” (1967a: 193). People in Martinique would look down on those who return with an accent that exposes them as Antilleans, a perfect example of the way colonial education works through cultural erasure and imposition. Because teachers teach French and not Creole in the Antilles, race inferiority and prejudice are normalized. Fanon highlights the possibility that feelings of inferiority can be the most acute in the most educated “Negroes” (p. 25). He shows how the “Negro” is reduced in colonial education to stereotypes about the physical or instinctive and the Jew to those about the intellectual and materialistic. Fanon also shows that the goal of “Negro” education should be revolutionary: “not to educate them, but to teach the Negro not to be the slave of their archetypes” (p. 35). Because of these archetypes, the “Negro” is expected to speak pidgin dialects rather than the refined French. Fanon contends: “What I am asserting is that the European has a fixed concept of the Negro, and there is nothing more exasperating than to be asked: ‘How long have you been in France? You speak French so well’” (p. 35). Language is power and the more French one speaks the “whiter” he becomes and the more human he claims to be.

Having exposed the drawbacks of colonial education and linguistic imposition, Fanon shows how politicized, colonial education can
function to yield a subservient personality or a revolutionary one. 
Fanon’s argument shows the potential of education for bringing about a radical change in power relations:

When a Negro talks of Marx, the first reaction is always the same: ‘We have brought you up to our level and now you turn against your benefactors. Ingrates! Obviously nothing can be expected of you.’ And then too there is that bludgeon argument of the plantation-owner in Africa: Our enemy is the teacher. (Fanon 1967a: 35)

Thus, Fanon’s revolutionary message is to teach the colonized to take the initiative rather than wait and react to what happens to him or simply accept things unquestioningly. A liberation education, according to Fanon, should make the colonized politically active and ready to make decisions or take action in the face of colonial hegemony. In Fanon’s words: “To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act” (1967a: 222). Here Fanon yokes theory and praxis while still working within a humanistic project. Theory appears along with political action. Fanon deems a new order with new values necessary for social change. His new humanism approaches the status of a Nietzschean re-examination/transvaluation of existing values as a necessary step for radical action.

Fanon’s overall achievement can be viewed as an attempt to restore humanity to the black man, who was dehumanized in the course of colonialism. However, Fanon’s argument, and despite its humanistic import, is seeded with revolutionary potential. For example, Fanon claims:

I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle, and he will pursue it, not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger. (Fanon 1967a: 224)

Nonetheless, Fanon is still working within the project of new humanism described at the beginning of this section. Retaliatory violence here is meant to counter colonial violence and exploitation. According to Macey, “[t]he counter-violence of the colonized is a form
of praxis, or purposeful human action determined by a project, that responds to and negates the primal and endemic violence of colonization. At the same time, it negates the colonized created by colonization and allows a 'new man' to emerge” (2000: 478). The end of Fanon’s book reveals a new assertive tone in line with Fanon’s new humanism: “I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: That of demanding human behavior from the other” (1967a: 229). Fanon’s overall achievement in BSWM is to argue for a new order of human relations that exacts humanism for the oppressed and imposes it on the oppressor. This hint at revolutionary humanism is echoed and elaborated in WE.

IV. THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH: FANON BETWEEN REVOLUTIONARY HUMANISM AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

Many critics tackle the problematic issue of violence whenever they approach Fanon’s WE. Critics often find it difficult to reconcile Fanon’s early manifest humanism with his advocacy of violence as a means of decolonization. Many critics misunderstand Fanon’s message and study his chapter “On Violence” out of context, suggesting that it is a call for absolute, unjustified violence. In a sense, they give the issue of violence more than its due and focus on this chapter at the expense of other chapters comprising the book. For example, Hannah Arendt claims that Fanon “glorified violence for violence’s sake” (qtd. in Gibson 2003: 104). Gendzier, by way of critiquing Fanon, also distinguishes between national versus individual violence and observes that “[t]o justify violence as part of the need for armed struggle in a process of national liberation is one thing; to justify individual acts of violence in the belief that they cleanse those who so act, is something quite different” (1973: 201). However, it might be argued that Fanon is advocating revolutionary violence, which, in turn, is an extension for his new humanism discussed earlier. Fanon is still working within a framework of new humanism aiming at a new set of relations between the oppressor and the oppressed. Decolonization, Fanon argues, is “quite simply the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another” (2004: 1). It subverts the existing Manichean world of colonialism and restores freedom and justice. A new humanity is supposed to emerge out of this violence; Fanon’s violence is a means to a worthy end, a necessary evil.

Some critics believe Fanon’s humanism is a revolutionary one and refer to it as “revolutionary humanism” (Nursey-Bray 1980: 135, 141).
In Fanon’s thought, this new humanism is forced on a reluctant oppressor to achieve a necessary change. Years of colonial violence and exploitation seem to justify revolutionary violence for Fanon in so far as the result is a new order built on universal values of equality, freedom, and justice. Fanon declares that “[t]he colonized subject is so starved of anything that humanizes him…” (2004: 90). He claims that colonialism negates the humanity of the colonized subject and puts his very human identity at stake: “Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: ‘Who am I in reality?’” (p. 182). Fanon exposes the hypocrisy of European colonialism carried out in the name of humanism:

For centuries Europe has brought the progress of other men to a halt and enslaved them for its own purposes and glory; for centuries it has stifled virtually the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called ‘spiritual adventure.’ Look at it now teetering between atomic destruction and spiritual disintegration. (Fanon 2004: 235)

Europe, Fanon argues, is murderous; it thrives on the denial of man. In the name of a spiritual adventure, Europe has enslaved and exploited man.

Rejecting European colonialism, Fanon addresses the colonized as comrades and brothers. His reminds them to “leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world” (2004: 235). He also inducts them to create a new model for themselves rather than imitate the Western model that brutalized man everywhere to conquer and exploit. As Europe negates humanity and hypocritically speaks of man, Fanon’s conclusion, then, is a moral imperative: “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 man” (p. 239). Fanon is thus still working within the new humanist project he began in *BSWM* even when he addresses violence. He memorably says: “At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence” (p. 51). Violence is presented by Fanon as a therapeutic force. “Cleansing” is often interpreted as a religious or psychological term denoting catharsis (Gibson 2003: 118). This Aristotelian “catharsis” implies that Fanon hints at purification and regeneration, a new start in human relations.
Violence can in this case touch the oppressor, elicit cleansing suffering on both sides, and restore the tranquility and humanity that existed before colonialism. It rids the oppressor of feelings of superiority as well. Fanon advocates a “revolutionary humanism” in that he asserts violence in the name of humanism. Fanon, according to Cherki, did not view violence “as the endpoint but as the engine of liberation, a mechanism whereby the self could be freed from the colonizer and all those who appoint themselves as living gods” (2006: 183-4). This violence is liberating rather than simply purifying. It is “a psychic necessity, the harbinger of a new man” (Jinadu 1973: 285). Decolonization and eliminating stereotypes should lead to the birth of a new man and a new humanism. If violence is used to achieve such an end, then it is a form of political action that is morally justified. Cherki argues in favor of Fanon’s “revolutionary humanism”: “The struggle for liberation allows the individual who has been objectified, demeaned, reduced to the status of an animal, and identified as ‘quintessentially evil’ to regain his humanity” (2006: 173). Having said this, we assume now that Fanon is still working within a humanistic project. Closely attached to this humanism is a politicized view of education as an important factor for nation building.

Colonialism effects an alienation from one’s culture and targets the colonized man’s head with lies about his barbarity and savagery. It distorts indigenous culture and history, and it is the intellectual’s task to reclaim these. In discussing Fanon’s WE, Fairchild points out the “psychological depreciation of the African’s self-worth and of the African’s culture and history” (1994: 192). This “depreciation” is internalized and becomes a means of social control. Colonialism, then, colonizes the native’s mentality along with the land and its resources. It nurtures a blind slave mentality or a new generation of people who adopt its manners of speaking, dressing, living, and thinking. Nursey-Bray argues that colonialism uses racism and the “debasement of national culture and history” as weapons for ideological domination (p. 137). She also argues that the colonizer attempts to instill in the colonized “a psychological dependency and distorted consciousness” (p. 138). Fanon deems political education as highly important for countering colonial tactics of intellectual and cultural hegemony. He clearly articulates the way colonialism functions through cultural and historical distortion:

The sweeping, leveling nature of colonial domination was quick to dislocate in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people.
The denial of a national reality, the new legal system imposed by the occupying power, the marginalization of the indigenous population and their customs by colonial society, expropriation, and the systematic enslavement of men and women, all contributed to this cultural obliteration. (Fanon 2004: 170)

Earlier in the book, Fanon links intellectual colonization with cultural erasure:

Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form of substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. This effort to demean history prior to colonization today takes on a dialectical significance. (Fanon 2004: 149)

Many theorists of culture have elaborated and built on the very premises that Fanon presents in his exposition of colonial cultural strategies. Cabral in ‘National Liberation and Culture’ discusses the intimate relationship between national liberation and cultural restoration. Repression of national culture, Cabral argues, has always been used to dominate the target society. Cabral succinctly says that “if imperialist domination necessarily practices cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture” (1974: 13). Resistance to imperial domination, consequently, implies a cultural act. Cabral touches on the colonizer’s techniques of cultural erasure like alienation and assimilation of an elite class into the colonial culture and distancing them from the masses (p. 14). According to another cultural theorist Fanon is concerned with “reclaiming national history and culture as a process of liberation and as an aftermath of decolonization” (Fairchild 1994: 197). “These efforts,” Fairchild argues, “are seen to be the natural byproduct of the colonial system’s overt efforts to obliterate indigenous cultural forms” (1994: 197). Decolonization, then, is supposed to help people reestablish their relationship to their roots, explore their potential, and relate to their pre-colonial history and culture which were suppressed by colonialism. Fanon, arguing in a similar line of thought, contends that the native intellectual should reject assimilation into the colonial system and focus instead on promoting national culture and awakening the people by writing revolutionary or national literature, i.e. educating them politically. Militant struggle needs to be supported by a national
spirit/consciousness conducive for decolonization. “For Fanon, then, a restructuring of consciousness was as vital as any other aspect of decolonization” (Nursey-Bray 1980: 142). This “restructuring” of consciousness refers to intellectual decolonization as compared with the violent, physical decolonization described in the opening chapter of WE.

Because colonization always resorts to distorting indigenous culture and using the educational system as a means for preserving the colonial culture and deepening a pathological self-image in the native, miseducation results in losing touch with one’s cultural values and traditions. It enhances alienation and self-hatred in the colonized. Therefore, Fanon highlights decolonizing the mind through political education. He argues: “The political education of the masses is now recognized as an historical necessity” (2004: 88). Colonial education demeanes the native population and reduces them to reductive stereotypes. The educated natives internalize such distortions and grow culturally alienated. As Fanon puts it in discussing the Algerian situation:

The Algerian, it was claimed [by colonialism], was a born criminal. A theory was elaborated and scientific proof was furnished. This theory was taught at universities for more than twenty years. Algerian medical students received this education, and slowly and imperceptibly the elite, after having consented to colonialism, consented to the natural defects of the Algerian people: born idlers, born liars, born thieves, and born criminals. (Fanon 2004: 221)

Fanon’s WE highlights the importance of the colonized intellectual for national struggle and liberation. The colonized intellectual can heighten a new national consciousness. Revolutionary humanism and its attendant consciousness should focus on political education to achieve a full break with the colonizer and colonization’s economic, social, and ideological paradigms. As Nursey-Bray points out, “[t]he ideology of the colonial world has to be totally expunged by the revolutionary raising of consciousness” (1980: 141).

Fanon’s stance on political education is to a large extent the building of a new national consciousness in the masses; a new consciousness makes the colonized subject mature and engaged in decolonization. Fanon argues: “The political education of the masses is meant to make adults out of them, not to make them infantile” (2004: 124). Politicizing the people, according to Fanon, means involving
Political education is supposed to make the people responsible for nation building and “elevate” their minds as responsible citizens; Fanon argues: “To be responsible in an underdeveloped country is to know that everything finally rests on educating the masses, elevating their minds, and on what is all too quickly assumed to be political education” (p. 138). He dwells on the same idea of a politically enlightening education and gives it this time a humanizing aspect. He argues: “We must elevate the people, expand their minds, equip them, differentiate them, and humanize them” (p. 137). Fanon also focuses on developing the mind of the colonized as a critical thinking tool capable of inventing the human essence of man by noting that “political education means opening up the mind, awakening the mind, and introducing it to the world. It is as Césaire said: ‘To invent the souls of men’” (p. 138). Fanon believes in the value of politicizing the masses as something that creates a new consciousness or a national spirit, motivates political action, and builds social solidarity. In a didactic tone typical of WE, Fanon argues:

To politicize the masses is not and cannot be to make a political speech. It means driving home to the masses that everything depends on them, that if we stagnate the fault is theirs, and that if we progress, they too are responsible, that there is no demiurge, no illustrious man taking responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people and the magic lies in their hands and their hands alone. (Fanon 2004: 138)

So, political speeches or lectures are not adequate for a revolutionary change. Political activity entails a new consciousness conducive for action. Hence, the native intellectual is necessary for the masses. Intellectuals as leaders of political parties need to steer revolutionary violence towards political ends.

Fanon focuses on the role of nationalism as an enlightening force that promotes social and political consciousness, and thus a new humanism. Consciousness raising and nation building are linked by Fanon to the overarching humanism he advocates. The national government, he thought, should “first restore dignity to all citizens, furnish their minds, fill their eyes with human things and develop a human landscape for the sake of its enlightened and sovereign inhabitants” (2004: 144). Fanon also argues that “[t]he consciousness of the younger generation must be elevated and enlightened” (p. 141); however, the building of the nation should make every enlightened
citizen “will here and now the triumph of man in his totality” (p. 141). Nation building should get its inspiration from and be driven by humanism in the Fanonian scheme of thought; it should be the result of people’s “brains and muscles” (p. 141); it should bring together revolutionary violence and political education and enlighten man about man. Fanon’s assertion crystallizes his conception of revolutionary humanism.

Fighting for the freedom of one’s people is not the only necessity. As long as the fight goes on you must re-enlighten not only the people but also, and above all, yourself on the full measure of man. You must retrace the paths of history, the history of man damned by other men, and initiate, bring about, the encounter between your own people and others (2004: 219). Revolutionary struggle in Fanon cannot be separated from attempts at enlightening man about his humanity and excavating and eliminating the sources of oppression. This new, open consciousness is what characterizes the new man and the new humanism Fanon talks about. As Nursey-Bray points out: “...for Fanon, the end product of revolutionary struggle is nothing less than the creation of a new set of human possibilities, not just for the colonized, but for all mankind” (1980: 140).

Decolonization should be followed by building a national culture, restoring the past and rejecting the colonizer’s culture. However, what happens when a national bourgeoisie assumes control after the colonial one leaves is a replication of colonial structures. Fanon exposes this bourgeois class in a manner reminiscent of Woodson’s critique of “Negro” intellectuals. This new national bourgeoisie distances itself from the masses and exploits the people. It also imitates its European counterpart. It fails to make the masses make use of its colonial education and intellectual capital. Thus, it fails in its leadership role. The masses sink in poverty while the neocolonial elite revel in exploiting, drinking, and gathering “ostentatious goods” (2004: 103).

The nationalist bourgeoisie consisting of colonized intellectuals and business elite attempts to be assimilated in the colonizer’s world as colonial structures serve their interests, which causes a new state of post-independence exploitation. Fanon is critical of the leaders of neocolonial countries who distance themselves from the masses and turn into exploiters of the people like the bourgeoisie “that wallows in corruption and gratification” (p. 112). This new ruling class is “an acquisitive, voracious, and ambitious petty caste, dominated by a small-time racketeer mentality, content with the dividends paid out by the former colonial power” (p. 119). It “lacks vision and inventiveness”
and “transforms itself not into a replica of Europe but rather its caricature” (p. 119). Fanon’s didactic stance serves to enlighten the neocolonial subject about the dangers of neocolonialism. This national bourgeoisie does not utilize its colonial education to rise up to the role of politically mobilizing the masses through education. It suppresses its revolutionary potential in return for material benefits. It neither fulfills its task in revolutionary humanism nor uses its education to bring about a radical break with the colonial heritage. It replicates miseducation.

V. Conclusion

Woodson and Fanon are radical educators and simultaneously humanists. They both believe in the potential of politicized education as liberating force that improves the lives of the oppressed. Both writers view education as potentially capable of building a national, racial consciousness and preserving cultural values. They also expose the negative effects of colonial education in perpetuating inferiority and passive assimilation into the colonial culture. In addition, they are both critical of the intellectual elite for helping maintain the status quo when they are capable of achieving a radical change. I argued that these thinkers seek a revolutionary change in power relations between the oppressor and the oppressed effected through a politicized version of education while framing this pedagogical stance within a humanistic concern about the oppressed races in particular and humanity in general. The desire to restore values of equality, justice, and freedom for their peoples does not seem to oppose these thinkers’ larger concerns about improved race relations and an improved human condition.

As modern thinkers, both Fanon and Woodson conflate education with culture, history, and politics. Their texts can be used as potential handbooks for independence due to the ideological import they have. Both writers tried to destroy racial stereotypes and restore human dignity to the oppressed. And both were aware of the psychology and normalization of colonial domination, and had the conviction that a new world order must come into being whereby the colonial legacy of the past is overcome. Woodson and Fanon can be called “emancipatory educators” (Potts 2003: 177). They wanted a form of cultural liberation achieved via political education and a social change necessary for the better of the human race. They realized that colonialism always affects the colonized man’s mind in the form of
intellectual domination; they also knew that colonialism blunts the colonized man’s thinking abilities and transforms him into a helping tool for his own subjugation. They were aware that colonialism impacts people’s “ways of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and learn” (Thaman 2003: 1). Hence, they argued for a politicized education and protested against the Western intellectual colonization. Education for them should be liberating by helping people to be independent and “actional.” They knew that miseducation engenders further miseducation.

Fanon and Woodson emerge as cultural critics. While their approach is somewhat pedagogical, their larger concerns with the lives of individuals under oppression render them theorists of culture. Hence, it is no wonder that Woodson discusses the diversity of cultural aspects that impact the Negro life in law, medicine, business, religion, schools and colleges, etc. Fanon, on the other hand, seeks a native culture that does not ape the colonizers’ culture and is aware of colonialism’s attempts at cultural erasure and imposition. The overall thrust of his argument against colonization is not only liberation, but rather intellectual emancipation and restoring a new culture that breaks with colonial legacy. Fanon knew that for colonial rule to dominate the native people and strengthen its grasp on the country it needs to distort the cultural life of the natives. Woodson is writing about the situation of African Americans decades after abolishing slavery, and Fanon is writing about the (neo)colonial Third World. A cultural change after decolonization and emancipation is deemed necessary for autonomous existence from the oppressors. Radicalized differences are rejected as they negate the humanity of the other, fix him, objectify him, and alienate him from his self.

Fanon and Woodson remain philosophers whose ideas appeal to cultural critics, educators, and humanists alike. Critics should reexamine their works for new insights into the definitions of education, humanism, and their happy marriage, i.e. “educational humanism.” Their concern with liberating man from his shackles and inhibitions and developing his full potential by educating him makes them proponents of humanism in education. They deem a social change necessary and see their tasks as exposing the world before the oppressed to help them effect a social change. The radical praxis they envision is revolutionary in the sense that it aims at a transformation of consciousness and a triumph for universal reason. Still, this praxis is driven by a new humanism that repudiates colonialism to celebrate the
essential humanity of man. The question we can rightly pose at the end is: are Woodson and Fanon idealists? Are their approaches representative of what some critics call “humanist idealism” (Cherki 2006: 179)? Is the future they wrote about as optimistic as they hoped? Their views on man, society, and education may be charged with “romanticism.” At the time being, and several decades after Fanon and Woodson expressed their beliefs about a new (educational) humanism, exploitation abounds and violence is rampant in “Third World” countries and elsewhere. African Americans, Middle Easterners, and Africans are still dominated in one way or another often educationally and culturally in an increasingly globalized world – and are still fighting for a real end of cultural, and even military, imperialism. Fanon and Woodson’s didacticism is in need of further thought and questioning.

Notes

1. I use “humanism” in a general sense to refer to a concern with human welfare, worth, capacities, reason, and dignity. Humanism as a philosophy celebrates notions of freedom, independence, understanding, justice, and progress. It celebrates human potential and strives to better human life. I specifically focus in this essay on educational humanism as Woodson and Fanon approve of an education that develops the human intellect and makes better individuals capable of facing life.

2. Woodson founded and promoted the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915, the Journal of Negro History in 1916, the Negro History Week in 1926, and the Negro History Bulletin in 1937. See Goggin (1993: xii, 84, 114).

3. Woodson is critical of the Negro church in The Miseducation of the Negro. He exposes its corrupt state and its imitation of white churches. See particularly pages 52-73. Fanon seems to have internalized the atheist existential philosophy of the Western canon he studied, especially that of Freud, Nietzsche, and Sartre.

4. Hereafter abbreviated as MN.

5. Hereafter abbreviated as BSWM.

6. Hereafter abbreviated as WE.

7. The later Fanon rejected Négritude as it was not “a program for social change and mobilization” and he saw “the cultural nationalism of black leaders like Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor” inadequate as a form of national struggle (Jinadu 1973. 271). Fanon advocated militant resistance and deemed cultural resistance in the form of literature and folklore as unable to affect a radical break with colonialism. Woodson, on the other hand, was not writing from Harlem, New York. MN was published in
1933, right after the flourishing of African American art and literature in Harlem during the 1920s. Writers like W.E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Langston Hughes, and Zora Hurston are more clearly identified with the New Negro Movement of Harlem than Woodson.

8. “Miseducation” is a loose term in Woodson’s book. However, it can refer to the shortcomings of “Negro” education in general and the way they bear on his personal and cultural life. According to Okafor, miseducation can mean “an education that tends to exclude and demean the cultural and historical experiences of the recipient but valorizes a culture which seeks hegemony within a body politic characterized by ethnic heterogeneity” (1992b: 579). Epps (1973) defines the miseducation of black Americans in terms of the “European bias that permeates almost all educational theory and practice” and “the failure of the schools to prepare blacks for successful competition in an urbanized technological society” (p. 328).

9. Okafor reiterates Woodson’s “Afrocentricity” elsewhere and says in another article that “Afrocentricity complements Woodson’s work by providing the specific route to the new direction that African education – continentally and diaspERICally – should follow” (1992b: 591).

10. For example, Fanon notes in *Toward the African Revolution* that “what the West has in truth not understood is that today a new humanism, a new theory of man is coming into being, which has its root in man” (125).

11. The Antillean “Negro’s” sleeping with white women upon arrival in France is seen as an attempt in this direction, i.e. assimilation and appropriating a human status denied because of racism. Fanon says about the relationship between the man of color and the white woman: “I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (1967a: 63).

12. We can view the impact of the colonial education Fanon and Woodson received in this light. Their exposure to the Western canon made them able to question and speak out against educational hegemony.

13. In 1955, Fanon once wrote about something similar linking theory with political praxis: “To act is to have a system of values. To act is to propose a hierarchical order superior to that which exists” (qtd. in Geismar 1971).

14. The whole book should be read in the light of an ongoing war of liberation in Algeria that lasted several years (1954-1962). The book was written and published (1961) before Algeria got its independence. Fanon saw firsthand the atrocities committed by the French colonial forces in Algeria and was reacting to them.

**References**


**SHADI NEIMNEH**  
HASHEMITE UNIVERSITY, JORDAN.  
E-MAILS: <shadistar2@yahoo.com>  
<snaamneh@excite.com>

&

**MARWAN M. OBEIDAT**  
PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN LITERATURE,  
HASHEMITE UNIVERSITY, JORDAN.  
E-MAIL: obeidat@hu.edu.jo