



Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences. by
Lewis R. Gordon

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tions, especially those that serve youth and women. Upper-class women are still substantially less likely than men to serve on elite nonprofit boards. In one of very few references to power aspects of class, Ostrower suggests this may be because upper-class women (unlike men) do not occupy top institutional positions of economic power in the larger society.

Wealthy donors studied here typically emphasize the personal and familial meanings of their gifts; are often actively involved in the organizations to whom they give; and rarely speak about their giving as a means of attaining broad social or political goals. While it is very important to them that philanthropy—which they consider public—retain its private elite control, they acknowledge tension around the issue of who has legitimate claim to money that is inherited instead of earned. They do not want to eliminate government or substitute philanthropy for it (contrary to demands of political conservatives), though they worry about the “dangerous concentration of power” in big government, and they do not want to pay higher taxes that (my interpretation) might allow government to fulfill its responsibilities.

Ostrower challenges the view taken by authors (like me and Teresa Odendahl) who criticize upper-class philanthropy for serving largely to support the power and privilege of the upper class. Ostrower’s data show that most wealthy donors give large amounts of money “to precisely the kinds of educational and cultural organizations that are used by, and have prestige among, the elite” (p. 39). She agrees that upper-class philanthropy benefits the upper class as well as the organizations that receive money. She says, however, (correctly) that the great majority of all philanthropy goes to organizations that donors benefit from, with very little overall directed to charitable organizations that help the poor. So why should rich donors be criticized for behaving like less affluent ones?

One obvious answer is that similar practices by people with very unequal amounts of resources and power have very unequal consequences. When the top 1 percent of the population, which owns 30 percent of the wealth, makes huge donations to support their own elite institutions, that hardly seems comparable to the far less affluent remaining 99 percent making much smaller donations

to their own churches. (The church comparison is Ostrower’s.) This kind of defense (Ostrower’s word) of elite philanthropy is possible only in an analysis that defines social class as social status—largely ignoring economic and political power and the ways that classes exist in relationship to one another, with the practices of one class materially and substantially affecting the lives of members of other classes.

Ostrower does not say what portion of her total sample actually belongs to what she calls the “social elite” or “social upper class,” which is odd since she specifically refers to the (appropriate) measures she used make this distinction. She does not provide other seemingly simple information about her sample (like the number of women), while other information (like breakdown by religion) is fully provided. She refers the reader to her 1991 Yale Ph.D. dissertation for more detail. (I could not find it in any Boston-area library.)

This book builds on and extends earlier research in very useful and important ways. Readers interested in class, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, gender, religion, and more general matters of culture and attitudes of U.S. citizenry toward government will find it valuable reading.

Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences, by **Lewis R. Gordon**. New York: Routledge, 1995. 137 pp. \$54.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-415-91414-0. \$16.95 paper. ISBN: 0-415-91415-9.

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Sociology has been concerned with theorizing difference since its inception. Critical to understanding social difference is the issue of individual and group identity. The identities that provided stability in past societies are being contested, giving rise to new identities and calling into question the process of identity formation. In part, our identities arise from being part of a distinctive historical, linguistic, religious, and political culture. Lewis R. Gordon’s well-written and clearly organized essay focuses on racial identity.

Sociologists are concerned with how people are represented and represent themselves within a particular, historically specific, social context. Gordon outlines how, in the Fanonian sense, racial identity is socially defined for the purpose of racial domination.

Frantz Fanon was born on the island of Martinique in July 1925. When he died, at the young age of 36, he was relatively unknown except among his fighting Algerian comrades, and a handful of French and African revolutionaries. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* attempts to place Fanon at the heart of the debate over the meaning and relevance of race and racism in the context of an antiblack society. During his lifetime, Fanon did not achieve an intellectual presence in America or Africa that would have any way foreshadowed his influence on contemporary thought. Because of his intellectual and political orientation, Fanon did not become a classic in the American academy. Though Fanon's critique was part of Western discourse, he rejected European notions of a racialized human nature and the European division of humanity into the black and the white—the ontological and fixed existence of racial identity.

As Gordon notes, unlike the Jews, “persons of color” had no existence prior to their pejorative conceptualization by post-Columbus Europeans. The person of color embodies the crisis of European racism. This racism, Fanon argued, “wiped out” the black person's customs and the social condition on which they were based because they were in conflict with the existence of the racism that sustained European colonization and enslavement. The reality of humanity is universal, and the partitioning of humanity is a form of social suicide. It is this social suicide that has become European civilization and represents the crisis of European man.

For Fanon, both whiteness and blackness are sicknesses produced by the social suicide of the European partitioning of humanity. Persons of color do not exist outside of their otherness. Thus, without the sameness of the European, the black is an elusive “being.” Black power is simply the flip side of white power, and both stem from the partitioning of humanity for the benefit of “Europe.” The black can never gain real power within this context, because to be black in an antiblack world is to be against one's own humanity.

The “black's freedom” is not “black freedom.” Whiteness and blackness are both dependent on black oppression and white domination, and this relationship influences how we study society. Gordon notes that “in a racist world there is a constant search for the positioning of racial pathologies versus the critical evaluation of racist structures that encourage pathological interpretations” (p. 40). It follows that racist arguments are a natural part of intellectual discourse in a racist society. In fact, it may be difficult for the uncritical intellectual to see his or her own racism. Gordon questions how we achieve an understanding of the human being within such a racist context. He argues that the work of Fanon suggests a way to study and to make a better world for human beings within a world dominated by antiblack racism.

Gordon points out how contemporary social scientists tend to remove the signifier “black” from its social and political context. This decontextualization has led many researchers to present racial categories as biologically constituted realities. They offer no critique of what race means, while they find themselves involved in the study of race relations. Fanon was a critic of the culture and politics of Europe in a peculiar way both essential to and distant from the core of the Eurocentric academy and its advocates. He represents a different type of intellectual, an activist intellectual, and his work challenged scholars to make their work relevant. Because he was a French colonial subject, his critique begins with French domination and ends with the anticolonial struggle. To Fanon, intellectual answers are to be found in a revolutionary praxis that transforms consciousness and reality.

Gordon views the crisis of present-day “man” as a problem of bad faith, in the Sartrean sense. The bad faith of the European mind and man limits his “ability to construct a tomorrow,” because his mind “is concealed in a totalization of the present” (p. 86). According to Gordon, it was Fanon who saw this totalization as an opportunity to present a new conceptualization of humanity, one that leads to Fanon's existentialism. According to Gordon, Fanon's existentialism seeks to transform races into human beings that interpret everyday reality and form social institutions: “In Fanon's explorations of the

everyday, there are both a description and a prescription for a human and humane world" (p. 87). Fanon presents a theory about race that speaks to the universal experience of human beings.

Modern scholarship is bound by disciplinary points of departure that weaken our analytical ability to understand oppression. Gordon notes that disciplines are themselves part of the oppression process. Therefore, we must go beyond the disciplinary assumptions of sociologists, historians, psychologists, economists, and literary theorists to offer a critique of modern scholarship on the oppressed. Only then will we be able to advance from racial theories to theory. As Gordon observes, however, Fanon was not concerned simply with theory formation. He was above all interested in social change, and he saw theory as a necessary tool in the process of transforming modern society into a human society.

The major shortcoming of Fanon's project is his explication of how to bring about an end to the crisis of European man. Throughout, Gordon urges us to help transform human identity into something more than a negation of Europe. And Fanon challenges us to change society and make race irrelevant, to create a new identity free of the racialized self. For this major task neither Gordon nor Fanon offers a satisfactory blueprint. Unlike most research on race, however, they have asked the correct question: What is race and who benefits from it?

Inside an American Concentration Camp: Japanese American Resistance at Poston, Arizona, by **Richard S. Nishimoto**. Edited by **Lane Ryo Hirabayashi**. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995. 262 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 0-8165-1563-8.

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This book represents an autobiographical statement and three research reports written by Richard Shigeaki Nishimoto while he was confined with 10,000 other Japanese Americans during World War II in the Colorado River War Relocation Center at Poston,

Arizona. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi selected these materials within a framework of resistance to racialized treatment.

Nishimoto documents the wrenching interplay among camp residents in coping with the unconstitutional internment by reason of race. He reports on how anomic conditions (involving capricious non-Japanese officials and inexperienced *nisei* [second-generation] youths) affected residents and how he assisted residents (1) to settle on rules and procedures for work gangs for dirty cleanup work of camp construction; (2) to control the rapid and pervasive penetration of organized, illicit gambling among first-generation *issei* and post-high school, second-generation *nisei* under enforced "leisure"; and (3) to aid residents to work through divisive cleavages in generational interests, in national loyalties, and in social class, regional, and religious differences in preparing for the closure of the camps and resettlement of the more needy and dependent residents, who were bereft of income, wealth, and property.

In today's societal context, the report on enforced "leisure" is a significant study of how racialization diverts human potential and productive careers. Nishimoto records the rapid entrapment of structurally unemployed and underemployed *issei* and young *nisei* from innocuous recreational gambling into organized gambling controlled by underworld interests abetted by corrupt judicial and police officials. With Nishimoto's grounded work and participation, the residents developed effective administrative, judicial, and law-enforcement controls. Nishimoto also enabled the disenfranchised *issei* to become more involved in camp management and with compensated, meaningful labor. The *nisei* were able to disengage from enforced leisure by participating in the military war effort and off-camp employment leaves, and through improved camp schooling and Rockefeller Foundation-supported off-camp high school and college placements. We need to compare these developments with how other racialized American populations in segregated urban settings today struggle under extreme structural unemployment and underemployment.

Nishimoto documents how resistive actions more often divided *issei* and *nisei*.