Frantz Fanon was born on 20 July 1925 in an assimilated and conventional black bourgeois family of Martinique in the French Antilles. His father was a customs officer of the French government in Martinique, and his mother was a shop-keeper. Irene L. Gendzier, based on his conversation with Joby Fanon, Fanon’s brother, says that Fanon’s father was of mixed Indian-Martiniqan origin, and that his mother was of Alsatian origin. (Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study 10). Fanon was the fourth and youngest of the four boys, and the middle child in a total of eight. Gendzier further observes that Fanon was “a highly sensitive child and a difficult man” (Gendzier 11). Quoting the authority of Peter Geismar (Fanon), Joby, and Marcel Manville (one of Fanon’s bosom friends), Gendzier writes that Fanon was very much influenced by Nietzsche, especially by his Thus Spake Zarathustra. Fanon, like Nietzsche was always “in a hurry, a man bent on doing as much as in as little time as possible” (Gendzier 12).

Like his brothers and sisters, Fanon had his early education in Forte-de France, the capital of Martinique. Fanon was proud of being the student of Aime Cesaire, who taught him and his friends “to be proud of their blackness” (Gendzier 14). In 1940, Fanon and Manville, along with their common friend, Mosole, joined the Free French Army, and proceeded to the European front. At that time Fanon did not
realize that the Second World War was a white man's war, and that the Martiniqans had no part in it. After two years of military service, and winning decorations, Fanon left the army. It was while working for the "Free French" in Algeria that Fanon and his friends witnessed rampant racism in the French army. Fanon then realized that France had actually reserved a different place for its black citizens. Emmanuel Hansen, in his Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought, observes that Fanon was "touched by the poverty, famine and destitution in Algeria" while working in the French army (Hansen 26). From here onwards Fanon was committed to revolutionary violence for the liberation of the oppressed. Later, Fanon's experience as psychiatrist in Algeria from 1953 to 1956, confirmed the thesis that he had already shaped in his mind while working in the French army. Fanon was wounded twice in the Second World War, and was decorated for 'Brilliant Conduct' in the last months of fighting. He used to work for seventeen hours a day. He had an astounding memory, a cutting sense of humour, and an unusual stage presence.

As already hinted, the early Fanon was very much influenced by his teacher, Aime Cesaire from the Lycee of Forte-de France. Later, he was remarkably influenced by Cesaire's seminal work on the disastrous effects of colonialism, Discourse on Colonialism. While he was a student of Cesaire at Lycee, Fanon evinced a keen interest in literature and philosophy. After returning from the warfront, for a period, Fanon was actively involved in Martiniqan politics. In the
parliamentary election to the first National assembly of the Fourth Republic, Fanon actively campaigned for Aime Cesaire, who was running on communist ticket. It was Fanon’s interest in Cesaire’s ‘negritude philosophy’ which prompted him to work for Cesaire.

Apart from the influence of Cesaire and Nietzsche, Fanon was very much influenced by the existential philosophy of Sartre, Hegel, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Kierkegaard. He was also well acquainted with the works of Lenin, Marx and Trotsky. Richard Wright’s works, especially his *Native Son*, tremendously influenced Fanon. Fanon was equally influenced by the revolutionary theories of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara. Of these writers and leaders, the most remarkable people who had a lasting impact on Fanon, were Cesaire, Sartre and Richard Wright.

Aime Cesaire was one of the founders of the “Negritude Movement” – the others being Leon Damas of Guyana, and Leopold Senghor, the Senegalese poet. Negritude was a cultural expression of the most eloquent kind. It was a movement for the revival of the indigenous cultures of Africa, and an energetic negation of the politics of assimilation. In Martinique, assimilation and French education were intertwined. Fanon and his siblings had to learn French patriotic songs in which French culture was exalted to the skies. On account of this intensive form of French colonial education, Fanon felt himself alienated. But for his association with Cesaire as a student, Fanon would not have been able to counter this alienation. Cesaire told
Fanon and his friends that there was nothing wrong in being ‘black’, on the contrary, it was indeed good to be so. In other words, what Cesaire taught them was that ‘black is beautiful’. Fanon believed that the negritude movement "in the dialectical progression would ultimately erase black and white racism to create a new human synthesis" as Irene L. Gendzier observes (Gendzier 38). That was why even while acknowledging the historical significance of ‘negritude’, Fanon later took a strong position against it. Fanon later proved himself to be a perfect example of linguistic assimilation. His works evidence how language could be used as a tool of assimilation, and consequently, as a tool of rebellion against alienation.

Bigger Thomas, the anti-hero of Richard Wright’s novel, Native Son profoundly influenced Fanon. Wright very effectively portrays the tyranny of alienation, anxiety and fear experienced by the American Negroes through the story of Bigger Thomas. Bigger’s violent, though inept rebellion against the stifling, murderous and totalitarian white world moved Fanon quite a lot. Fanon was really touched by the profound political, economic and social issues raised by Richard Wright through his anti-hero, Bigger. Bigger, the black rebel of the ghetto is the product of a dislocated society. He is a dispossessed and disinherit man. In spite of the fact that Bigger lives amidst the greatest plenty on the earth, nothing ever happens in his life. This existential anguish of Bigger agitated Fanon a lot. Bigger, like the Antillean Negro, is a person who is excluded from, and unassimilated
in the white American society. He has been earnestly aspiring to gratify his impulses, which are more or less akin to the impulses of the white people. His realization that the white society has been denying him all opportunities to fulfill his desires makes him a rebel. Thereafter, every movement of his body is an unconscious protest; every thought of his is a potential murder. Bigger murders Mary Dalton quite accidentally, without thinking, without plan, without any conscious motive. But, after the murder, he accepts the moral guilt and responsibility for the murder. He feels elated. He has a feeling that he is free for the first time in life. Like Fanon, Wright also speaks strongly of the silent complicity of the church in the oppression of the Negroes. Fanon was all the more moved by the story of Bigger Thomas when he realized that *Native Son* is an autobiographical novel. The dialectics between resentment and rebellion as presented in the character of Bigger Thomas strengthened Fanon’s outlook on alienation.

When Fanon was twenty-two years old, his father died, and consequently, he was financially hard-pressed. He had no other option but to seek a scholarship in some French university, which he eventually obtained. After getting the scholarship, Fanon, along with Manville and Mosole, departed for Paris, to become a dentist. But, within three months, he realized that he could not cope with the people of the dentist school, for, in the eyes of the French, a Negro was always a Negro. Then he moved over to Lyons with the objective of
becoming a surgeon, and then, switched on to psychiatry. While Fanon was in Lyons, he was actively involved in student politics, debates and left-wing meetings. While at the university in Lyons, Fanon continued his interest in literature and philosophy. He was very much impressed by the existential philosophy of Sartre. *Orphee Noir* (Black Orpheus), *Anti-Semite and the Jew*, and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, were the major works of Sartre which influenced Fanon in formulating his theory of decolonization later.

Since the days of the defense of his medical thesis at Lyons, Fanon was an effective public speaker. His first major speech, before he became a member of the National Liberation Front of Algeria (hereafter referred to as FLN due to the peculiarity of translation from the French), was given at the Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris in September 1956. Fanon was by nature very talkative. He would be very much offended if anybody tried to check him during his conversation under any pretext. One day, a year before his death, Fanon joined Sartre for lunch, and the conversation lasted until two in the next morning. It was Simone De Beauvoir who broke the conversation in her best polite way, saying that Sartre was sleepy. But Fanon was offended so much so that he retorted that he did not like people who hoard their resources. Commenting on this gesture of Fanon, De Beauvoir says that like the Cubans, the Algerian revolutionaries never slept more than four hours a night (*Force of Circumstances* 606). Fanon was so fond of Sartre that on another
occasion, he told Jaques Lanzmann that he would give twenty thousand francs a day to be able to talk to Sartre from morning to night for two weeks. Fanon’s revolutionary fervour was quite conspicuous in his expression that, as Simone De Beauvoir says, “He communicated this fire to others” (De Beauvoir 611). De Baeuvoir further observes that when one was with Fanon, life seemed to be a tragic adventure, often horrible, but of infinite worth.

Fanon was very fond of good food and dress, and he almost always dressed nicely. In 1951, Fanon defended his medical thesis on psychiatry before a board of five professors. In that year itself Fanon fell in love with Josie Duble, a white woman slightly younger than himself, whom he had met at Lyons. They got married in 1952. Josie being an intelligent and sensitive woman, later became an important intellectual influence on Fanon. In 1952 itself Fanon was admitted to the residency programme at the Hospital de Saint Alban, under Professor Tosquelles. The professor’s influence on Fanon was one of the most tremendous and far-reaching in his life. Fanon derived a lot of inspiration from Professor Tosquelles’ concept of ‘socio therapy’ in psychiatric treatment. (Under ‘sociotherapy’ or ‘communal therapy’, the hospital functions as a community of doctors, nurses and patients helping each other, apart from the other hospital staff taking care of the patients). Fanon’s experience in the company of Professor Tosquelles has been instrumental in his undertaking of medical
reforms at Blida Hospital in Algeria, where he was appointed as a
psychiatrist by the French government there in 1953.

Fanon was very attractive, and was an extremely good athlete. He
was a very good football player, and it was his interest in football and
communal therapy which guided him to form the soccer team at the
Blida hospital.

The beginning of the armed revolution against the French
presence in Algeria, on 1 November 1954 had a decisive impact on
Fanon the psychiatrist. His first-hand experience of torture at the
Blida Hospital itself made Fanon believe that the economic
oppression, political violence, racism, murder and the overall
dehumanization of the natives of Algeria were the direct consequences
of the social system there. Fanon’s earlier realization in Martinique
that alienation was the major stumbling block to the self-realization
and freedom of the colonized was further confirmed by his experience
in Algeria. And the only solution to the problem of alienation, Fanon
realized, was to put an end to the colonial system itself. As the
Algerian War for Liberation began to gain momentum, in 1956, in his
quite dramatic letter of resignation from the Blida Hospital, addressed
to Lacoste, the French minister in charge of his department, Fanon
stressed this need, and thus openly declared himself an Algerian. For,
Fanon says: “A society that drives its members to desperate solutions
is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced” (TAR 53). Such a
conclusion was arrived at when Fanon realized that “the social
structure in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged" (TAR 53). He had the strong conviction that the events which took place in Algeria were “the logical consequence of an abortive attempt to decerebralize a people” (TAR 53).

While working at the Blida Hospital as its director (as a French civil servant), as Simone De Beauvoir observes, Fanon “harboured guerilla leaders both in his home and in the hospital, gave them drugs, taught the freedom fighters how to care for their wounded, trained teams of Moslem nurses” (De Beauvoir 607). Fanon remained at Blida until he was expelled from Algiers (Jan., 1957), and then went to Tunis to work for the FLN. Fanon’s arrival in Tunis was the beginning of the most politically active phase in his life. From Tunis he began to write for El Moujahid, the mouthpiece of the National Liberation Front, and for The African Resistance. This resulted in his intense collaboration with the political leadership of the Algerian National Movement. Within a couple of years of his arrival in Tunis, Fanon became a militant supporter, and later, a member of the FLN. As Renate Zahar remarks, “Here was the committed revolutionary incarnate, the French intellectual who had broken with the motherland to fight in the frontline of the anti-imperialist struggle . . . ” (“Biographical Sketch” Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation xiv).

Fanon was immensely pained to note that neither the French democratic left nor the communist left favoured the concept of the
liberation of Algeria from France. He realized that the French Left feared the FLN would turn too much towards the then Soviet Union, while the Communist Left feared that the Algerians would replace American imperialism for French colonialism. As Gendzier observes, "The question of neo-colonialism and economic dependence was a subject which haunted him to the end" (Gendzier 188). From 1957 onwards (since Fanon went to Tunis), there was a significant change in the attitude of Fanon towards the Algerian revolution. His total dedication to the cause of the rebellion is evident in the language he used thereafter. For, as Emmanuel Hansen comments, "the reflective 'I' that had characterized Black Skin, White Masks, gave way to the committed 'we', the Algerians" of The Wretched of the Earth (Hansen 45).

In December 1958 Fanon attended the All-African People's Conference in Accra, where he met The African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba. In 1959 he participated in the Second Congress of Black Writers in Rome as part of the Algerian delegation. Again, as a member of the Algerian delegation, Fanon attended the Second Conference of African Peoples in Tunis in 1960. Through his speeches in these conferences Fanon succeeded in internationalizing the Algerian struggle for freedom. By then he could convince the people of the world at large that the Algerian Nationalist Movement was part of the whole world movement for the liberation of the Third World as a whole. In March 1960, Fanon was appointed as
the representative of the Algerian Provisional Government in Accra. That Fanon had survived numerous assassination attempts against him drives home his commitment to the cause of the Algerian people.

In late 1960 Fanon and his friends realized that he was suffering from leukemia. He was flown to the Soviet Union for medical treatment, but the Russians advised him to go to the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, America. But Fanon refused to be taken to America saying that it was a ‘country of lynchers’, and returned to Tunis. A further relapse in his health prompted his friends to make arrangements for his eventual travel to Maryland. Emmanuel Hansen, quoting the authority of Joseph Aslop, a columnist of the Washington Post, says that it was the CIA which had arranged the transportation of Fanon from Tunis to Washington. Simone De Beauvoir tells us that when Fanon was flown to Washington to treat his leukemia, he had “been left to rot in his hotel room for ten days, alone without medical attention” (De Beauvoir 621). Her observations in this regard are supported by the letters and telephonic conversations with Joby Fanon, Fanon’s brother.

As a result of another relapse, due to double bronchial pneumonia, Fanon breathed his last on 6 December 1961, at the young age of 36. By then, Fanon had read the proof of The Wretched of the Earth, the book which has been described as the Bible of Decolonization, in which he diagnoses colonialism, and suggests in
quite unmistakable clarity and precision the ways for authentic decolonization.

Fanon was buried in a National Liberation Army territory. Simone De Beauvoir’s comment on Fanon’s funeral ceremony is moving indeed. For, she says, “for the first time, and in the middle of the war, the Algerians gave one of their people a national funeral” (De Beauvoir 621).

By the end of his short and active life Fanon had done the maximum he could to realize his ideals. Even while he was face to face with death, the irresistible urge to uphold his ideals was his prime concern. For, in a letter addressed to his friend Roger Tayeb, four weeks before his death, Fanon says:

We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty. I want you to know that even at this moment, when the doctors have given up hope, I still think . . . of the Algerian people, of the people of the Third World. And if I’ve held on this long, it’s because of them. . . . (qtd. by Geismar in Fanon 185 from a new collection of Fanon’s works, ed. by C. Pirelli)

Fanon’s wife, Josie Fanon, and their son, remained in Algeria even after his death, and assumed Algerian citizenship.

That in Algeria places have been named after Fanon, and in the United States and in Italy, research centres have been established in
his memory are pointers to the popularity which Fanon enjoys even today. The French speaking Canadians invoke Fanon to support their claims for self-determination for Quebec. Blida Hospital in Algeria has been renamed as Frantz Fanon Psychiatric Hospital after the liberation of Algeria in 1962. Aime Cesaire, his one-time teacher and for some time one of the major influences on him, pays perhaps a very glowing tribute to Fanon. For, Cesaire observes, if the word 'commitment' has any meaning, it was with Fanon that it acquired significance. He further says that Fanon’s “violence . . . was that of the non-violent . . . the violence of justice, of purity, and intransigence” (as qtd. in Hansen 52 from Presence Africaine 12 [1962]: 131-32).

The very fact that the four books Fanon has to his credit (Black Skin, White Masks, Studies in a Dying Colonialism, Toward the African Revolution, and The Wretched of the Earth) have been so widely discussed not only in the Third World, but in the West as well, drives home the fact that the problems Fanon discussed are not unique to Algeria only. David Caute ranks Fanon with Che Guevara, and comments that Fanon “spoke for the black Antilles, for Algeria and black Africa with the same inexorable logic and the same transparent love of justice that Guevara spoke for the peasants and peons of Latin America” (Fanon 7). A close analysis of Fanon’s works has revealed that Fanon indeed is the Che Guevara of the oppressed of the whole world. For, Fanon was not only a political theoretician, but a true scholar-activist who dedicated his life for the liberation of the wretched of the earth.