



Discourse on Colonialism

Aimé Césaire, Joan Pinkham, Robin D.G. Kelley

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"Cesaire's essay stands as an important document in the development of third world consciousness--a process in which [he] played a prominent role."

--*Library Journal*

This classic work, first published in France in 1955, profoundly influenced the generation of scholars and activists at the forefront of liberation struggles in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Nearly twenty years later, when published for the first time in English, **Discourse on Colonialism** inspired a new generation engaged in the Civil Rights, Black Power, and anti-war movements and has sold more than 75,000 copies to date.

Aime Cesaire eloquently describes the brutal impact of capitalism and colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized, exposing the contradictions and hypocrisy implicit in western notions of "progress" and "civilization" upon encountering the "savage," "uncultured," or "primitive." Here, Cesaire reaffirms African values, identity, and culture, and their relevance, reminding us that "the relationship between consciousness and reality are extremely complex. . . . It is equally necessary to decolonize our minds, our inner life, at the same time that we decolonize society." An interview with Cesaire by the poet Rene Depestre is also included.

Discourse on Colonialism Details

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Yann says

Μ? κρ?νετε, ?να μ? κριθ?τε: ?ν ? γ?ρ κρ?ματι κρ?νετε, κριθ?σεσθε: κα? ?ν ? μ?τρ? μετρε?τε, μετρηθ?σεται ?μ?ν. Τ? δ? βλ?πεις τ? κ?ρφος τ? ?ν τ? ?φθαλμ? το? ?δελφο? σου, τ?ν δ? ?ν τ? σ? ?φθαλμ? δοκ?ν ο? κατανοε?ς; ? π?ς ?ρε?ς τ? ?δελφ? σου, ?φες ?κβ?λω τ? κ?ρφος ?π? το? ?φθαλμο? σου: κα? ?δο?, ? δοκ?ς ?ν τ? ?φθαλμ? σου; ?ποκριτ?, ?κβαλε πρ?τον τ?ν δοκ?ν ?κ το? ?φθαλμο? σου, κα? τ?τε διαβλ?ψεις ?κβαλε?ν τ? κ?ρφος ?κ το? ?φθαλμο? το? ?δελφο? σου.

Ne jugez point, afin que vous ne soyez point jugés. Car on vous jugera du jugement dont vous jugez, et l'on vous mesurera avec la mesure dont vous mesurez. Pourquoi vois-tu la paille qui est dans l'œil de ton frère, et n'aperçois-tu pas la poutre qui est dans ton œil ? Ou comment peux-tu dire à ton frère : Laisse-moi ôter une paille de ton œil, toi qui as une poutre dans le tien ? Hypocrite, ôte premièrement la poutre de ton œil, et alors tu verras comment ôter la paille de l'œil de ton frère.

Matthieu 7.1-5

Προσ?χετε δ? ?π? τ?ν ψευδοπροφητ?ν, ο?τινες ?ρχονται πρ?ς ?μ?ς ?ν ?νδ?μασιν προβ?των, ?σωθεν δ? ε?σιν λ?κοι ?ρπαγες. ?π? τ?ν καρπ?ν α?τ?ν ?πιγ?σεσθε α?το?ς: μ?τι συλλ?γουσιν ?π? ?κανθ?ν σταφυλ?ν, ? ?π? τριβ?λων σ?κα; Ο?τως π?ν δ?νδρον ?γαθ?ν καρπο?ς καλο?ς ποιε?: τ? δ? σαπρ?ν δ?νδρον καρπο?ς πονηρο?ς ποιε?.

Gardez-vous des faux prophètes. Ils viennent à vous en vêtements de brebis, mais au dedans ce sont des loups ravisseurs. Vous les reconnaîtrez à leurs fruits. Cueille-t-on des raisins sur des épines, ou des figues sur des chardons? Tout bon arbre porte de bons fruits, mais le mauvais arbre porte de mauvais fruits.

Matthieu 7.15-17

Matthew says

One of the most essential books for anyone committed to freedom.

Emily Shaw says

If you would like a quick primer on the application of Lenin's Right of Nations to Self-Determination, read Cesaire. He practically quotes Marx, but not Lenin, while throwing around "comrade" and "proletariat" and "revolution."

Plus, he's actually hilarious. I'm sure that some of the humor was lost in translation, but when I got to the part about colonialist Europe "chewing on Hitler's vomit"...I lost it.

Ioana says

Aimé Césaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" is a poignant exploration of the brutality, indifference, and dehumanizing effect of colonization on both colonizer and colonized. Colonization rips the soul out of both, driving the colonizers to violence and race hatred, and the colonized towards psychic and soulful death. However, "the mechanization of man, the gigantic rape of everything intimate" does not give the white man a second thought, not until this monstrous dehumanizing colonial impulse diffuses throughout Europe and colonizes the white man—as fascism. This is what Césaire sees as the end of the road of capitalism and the Western mentality of rationality, hierarchy and domination: an ultimate devastation of bodies, souls, and land.

A brilliant, evocative, poetic essay by a surrealist artist/writer whose work should be read as foundational for anyone with an interest in post-colonial thought.

Hussain Laghabí says

One of my beautiful experiences of reading post-colonial literature along with Edward Said's Orientalism. And the difference between is that Said is an academic but Césaire not only a poet but a Marxist comes from a Third World country originally!

This style looks very unique to me and could be one of the most beautiful (styles) of writing I've ever read in both Arabic and English and can't imagine how more beautiful it must be if read in French ,the original language of the text."

Finally:

"My consolation is that periods of colonization pass, that nations sleep only for a time, and that peoples remain."

Aime Cesaire

Rana says

Especially intrigued by Césaire's conception of the effects of colonialism on the colonist. Morrison echoes

these effects in Beloved, the white, when he looks at the slave as an animal- an ape, himself becomes an ape.

We speak of Hitler-ism as a "strange"/ fearsom/unwanted phenomenon. We pretend, and some really are, shocked by Trump-ism today, but we only fool ourselves. Listen to what every other voice of the hegemonic powers are saying and they are the same. Simply clothed in decent clothes. "Don't let the subtleties of vocabulary, the new terminology, frighten you! You know the old refrain: "the-Negroes-are-big-children." They take it, they dress it up for you, tangle it up for you. The result is Mannoni..." Trump and Hitler have not risen out of a vacuum, they are a result of an inherently racist colonial white society. The humanism of the "respectable bourgeois", of the white man's burden still plague us today. This diseased sense of responsibility heard in all the Western leaders voices towards the east is nothing but, to repeat, diseased.

Jeune Fille says

"They talk to me about civilization, I talk about proletarianization and mystification.

For my part, I make a systematic defense of the non-European civilizations.

Every day that passes, every denial of justice, every beating by the police, every demand of the workers that is drowned in blood, every scandal that is hushed up, every punitive expedition, every police van, every gendarme and every militiaman, brings home to us the value of our old societies.

They were communal societies, never societies of the many for the few.

They were societies that were not only ante-capitalist, as has been said, but anti-capitalist.

They were democratic societies, always.

They were cooperative societies, fraternal societies.

I make a systematic defense of the societies destroyed by imperialism."

?????? ??????? ??????? says

It was a really nice and simple style used to describe and analyse a question that long has been on top. It's that "Europe is Undefinable", that's quite right. I think the writer is taking the scope to defend the African culture that long has been a source of fun and envy. Colonizers says that they are coming to improve the life of Barbary, but in fact they come just to accomplish their profit, and this is what they are doing for the moment. Thanks Aimé for this nice work.

Dusty says

Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* is a thin book that's sat unopened on my bookshelf for far too long. As a student of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, I hear now and again about Césaire in tangential ways, and when I ran across this title for fifty cents in a used bookstore, I figured what the heck. Flash forward a year and a

few months, I'm reading Fanon and Glissant for class and studying for a PhD exam, and it's finally time to take the plunge. It was overdue.

Writing in 1950, just after the Second World War, Césaire counters the "shock" that Mussolini's and Hitler's fascism (not to mention the Holocaust) had caused the European world by pointing out that in fact these events had been anticipated by the extermination of indigenous peoples in the Americas and the enslavement of millions more from Africa. The scandal, he writes, is that Hitler would have the audacity to subject white people to the same brutality. The point here is not that white people got what they deserved, but rather that colonization and dehumanization are constant features of bourgeois capitalism, and that inescapably colonizers undergo what Césaire calls "the boomerang effect": In order to justify their moral relativism, they depict other people as barbaric animals, but in the actions they take following this rhetorical maneuver, they transform *themselves* into animals.

The essay is provocative and reads smoothly. The editor, Robin D. G. Kelley, aptly calls it a "prose poem," and this is substantiated in the interview printed afterward, in which Césaire says he finally came into his own as a poet after he denounced poetry. We are roughly introduced to the concept of *negritude*, which for the author means recovering the shared African past for all the world's black people in order not to feel apologetic about working toward a shared black future, and the philosophical seeds that would sprout in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* and Glissant's essays are apparent.

Anders Hjortshøj says

A searing, clear-sighted denunciation in shining prose of European, particularly French, colonial hypocrisy that has lost none of its relevance as apologists of empire and crypto-racists still are plentiful throughout the Western world.

The effectiveness of the message comes from Césaire detailing not just the torture, oppression and sociocultural retardation resulting from imperialism, but the lamentable process by which progressive, humanist Europeans, in seeing the Other as a barbarian, gradually become far more vicious and bloodthirsty barbarians themselves. Colonialism does not just degenerate and weigh down the colonies, it degrades and brutalizes the European spirit. Hitler, in this view, was not an aberrant accident of history: the horrors of the Nazi regime were the colonial racist mindset stretched to its logical conclusion and applied to white-skinned bodies (therefore shocking).

It occupies little space in the text, but I hold back from a fifth star because of the author's naivety about the Soviet Union, which he tentatively suggests as an experiment for a better system. It should have been possible for a well-informed man in 1955 to see that country for what it was. That aside, the moral clarity and righteous indignation on display here make it a timeless, worthwhile essay.

Zulqarnain Ali Zaki says

Aimé in his essay, written in 1955, explains how the process of colonialism dehumanises not only colonizer but also colonized. Colonizers treat others like they are less human and needs to be tamed while colonized starts suffering from inferiority complex and gets alienated with his own identity.

This essay is a precursor to the powerful writings of Franz Fanon, Edward Said and many other post-colonial writers.

If someone is interested in decolonising her mind, this book is a must read.

Dhanaraj Rajan says

It is claimed that it is one of the pioneering works in the study of post colonialism.

Here Aime Cesaire does not write like a theorist or an academician. He is basically a literary figure/poet. So, naturally his writing is poetic than academic. But that does not mean it is purely fictional. It may be a first ever realist take on colonialism.

Colonialism is founded on a venomous ideology - an ideology of racial and cultural hierarchy. He proves it citing many examples from the historical, religious, philosophical and literary records. To lord over a race or a country, a philosophy/ideology was extremely necessary. More importantly that ideology should help in numbing the conscience of the colonizer. Thus was born the idea of racial hierarchy. Obviously the white race is at the top of the ladder and they are born soldiers/rulers. The other races are born laborers (Chinese/yellow people) or agriculturalists (blacks). These races love to be ruled because they cannot rule themselves. In the process, any kind of violence is silently approved by the white people of Europe. The irony was that such thoughts evolved in Europe when humanism was the ruling philosophy. Obviously, Cesaire mocks at the humanism of Europe. It is humanism of white men. Period.

In fact, Cesaire finds the origin of fascism in colonialism. He writes that when millions of blacks were tortured in Africa, coolies were killed in India, people were tortured in Madagascar the people in Europe never raised an objection. This he says paved the way for fascism. Later when Hitler took the same measures of treatment reserved for the colonized to the white people of Europe, the Europeans could not understand. According to them Hitler's crime was not the crime against human being or a human dignity. It was the crime against the WHITE PEOPLE.

Besides, Cesaire also says that colonization results in dehumanizing both the colonizer and the colonized. For the colonizer, it dicivilizes him. To calm his conscience (born out of tortures rendered to the colonized or the mass killing), he considers the colonized as mere animal. Thus, all his base elements are given free reign that result in brutish behaviours. For the colonized it is a humiliation and a perennial fall into the inferiority complex.

Cesaire writes all these in a passionate way and one cannot but be moved. And for me, a person from a colonized country the impact was powerful. Also, it is not a mere illogical blabber. He gives evidences to his theories and they are shocking and revealing at the same time.

A powerful book.

Note: This edition also contains an excellent introduction by Robin D. G. Kelly which is titled as "A Poetics of Anticolonialism." Five stars for introduction.

Hadrian says

An angry snarl of resentment and righteous anger, an indictment of centuries of crimes. It hides under the rather innocuous title 'Discourse of Colonialism', but instead might be appropriate 'Damn you and damn your

hypocrisy and hate that led to hundreds of years of atrocities', or something like that.

The book moves from condemnation of wars and injustice, to attacks on now-obsolete colonial theorists and 'racialists'. Cesaire makes the bold statement that Nazism is so infamous in Europe because it committed the same atrocities that the Europeans did to other, non-white nations. Slavery, mass extermination, economic exploitation, racial/social engineering, and so forth.

Cesaire does stray into a few grey areas, though. He cites the Soviet Union as a possible source of post-colonial liberation. That state is just imperialism with a new coat of paint. He also does make a few wrong statements which modern anthropology has corrected, but he'd likely be fine with that. In fact, he'd be proud to see the advances in some of these fields.

These little nitpicks do not detract from the overall strength of his feeling. The book itself is not without flaws, but it helped to spark a movement, of peoples rising up and a radical change in intellectual discourse. That alone gives it a place in history.

Zenah says

I thought this was brilliant. I love reading things like this that ensure me, that the dynamics of this world ARE indeed unjustified, and that it is NOT ME. What I love most, is the power it gives me, as an Arab, to tell those who try to convince me of their racial superiority, or those who are acting on self-imposed sense of authority to go fuck themselves. Or those who try to convince me that killing languages, cultures, and countries in the name of common good -AKA the good of the white man- is justified. I will be a dam to the waves of imperialist, racist thinking, that are crashing against us, even if it will tear me down.

Note: I read the English version and it's available in PDF online. It's a very short read, but very powerful.

?????? ????? says

"It is a fundamental error to consider the other cultures as inferior to our own simply because they are different."

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“[the] primitive man talks raving nonsense.

Of course, there remain a few small facts that resist this doctrine. To wit, the invention of arithmetic and geometry by the Egyptians. To wit, the discovery of astronomy by the Assyrians. To wit, the birth of chemistry among the Arabs. To wit, the appearance of rationalism in Islam at a time when Western thought had a furiously pre-logical cast to it.”
