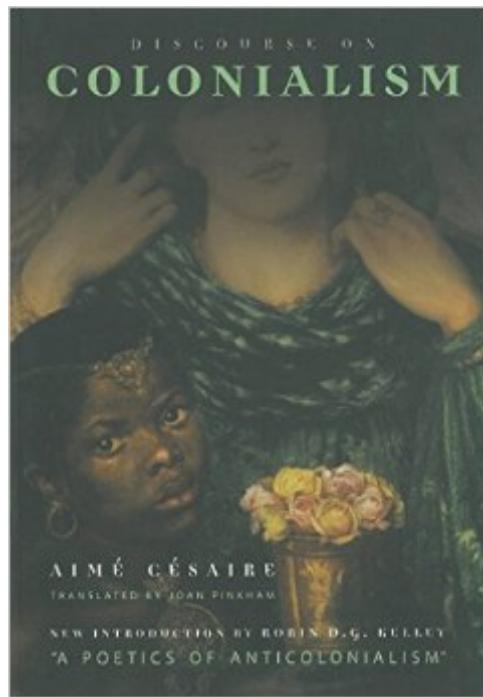


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# Discourse On Colonialism



## Synopsis

"Césaire'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. Aimé Césaire 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, Césaire 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 Césaire by the poet René Depestre is also included.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While best known as a poet, Aimé Césaire proves himself in this work to be a first-rate political and cultural critic. His *\*Discourse on Colonialism\**, along with Frantz Fanon's *\*Wretched of the Earth\** are the seminal consciousness-raising works for colonialized peoples. Although Fanon and his book

are the more famous, it is not obvious that this is justified. Cesaire brings his immense linguistic and poetic talents to his discourse, resulting in a work which is not only insightful, but moving and motivating as well. Cesaire condemns European imperialism in Africa and the Americas as evidence that European civilization is fundamentally sick and dying. He accuses Europe of turning a blind eye to the suffering caused by imperialistic rule, for the colonizer as well as the colonized. Most importantly, he calls to account not only the colonized people, but the Europeans as well. It is not only a powerful indictment, but a call to action and an attempt to shatter European self-deception. Even in a political climate that has changed greatly since Cesaire wrote this piece, it may well be one of the best things you'll read all year. One final note: If you are wondering just what all the fuss is about, then this book is definitely for you. Reading Cesaire will not only enlighten--it's one of those rare works that may even sensitize someone to injustice they may not care about, or may not even have noticed. In the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr., Susan Brownmiller and Richard Mohr; Cesaire's *\*Discourse on Colonialism\** is an eye-opener. It is one of those rare books that has the real potential to make one a morally better person.

This book was written before Fanon's "Black Skins, White Masks". Much of what Fanon did in his great debut is elaborate on Cesaire's work, add psychiatric aspects to it, and further explore the ideas of Cesaire. Cesaire's denunciation of the West (both Europe and the US) is based on two pillars - one is the Western deeply racist and violent attitude towards the then colonized world, and the second is Cesaire's Marxist leanings. He mentions the Soviet Union in one short sentence as an example of a positive society - how were people misled by Stalinist Russia was a mystery. But in the forward by Robin Kelly we learn that Cesaire quit the communist party and denounced Stalinism as early as 1956. Cesaire's strongest point is that French attitudes towards Africa (half a century ago !) bear a close resemblance to German Nazi attitudes towards Jews and other "inferior" people. The forward by Robin Kelly and the interview with Cesaire at the end add a lot of substance to this powerful but short essay. This book is highly recommended to people who appreciate Fanon, and all those who wish to learn the roots of anti colonial philosophy.

This is a fascinating book for folks interested in the international decolonization movement of the 50s and 60s, and its relation to the Black Power movement in the States. The Discourse is beautifully written and passionately argued. The interview helps clarify Cesaire and Senghor's concept of "Negritude" as an early form of Black pride, rather than racial essentialism. The essay introduction is worthwhile since it puts the book in relation to Cesaire's poetic work and the

Surrealist movement in France, America, and the Antilles. It's unduly dismissive of Cesaire's Marxist politics, especially since it goes against the spirit of the interview appended at the end.

As the previous reviewer (American) has stated this book is a powerful indictment of European colonialism. However, the author wrote this book in 1950s, the heyday of the independence movement against the 19th century European empires, i.e. Britain, France, Portugal, etc. and therefore that is its focus. What is condemned here has also the epitome of U.S. policy and economic activity in the Third World for the last half century, so Americans should not think that this condemnation is about something other than many of the taken-for-granted policies of the American empire. The rhetorical tone of the book may ring as a bit dated to ears used to ignoring what goes on in minds and hearts not located in the First World, but the events of 9/11 may give them new relevance. One would hope so. Historically this book was of great importance, and it deserves rereading today - especially in the U.S.

One of the best readings I have ever done. Any reader will embrace everything Cesaire says. We all face some sort of discrimination, and many of us face racism everyday whether we are victims or witnesses. This work opened my eyes to what I always thought was justified colonialism, especially that by European states. Cesaire is direct and drives his comment to the core of our being. Highly recommended for anyone hoping to understand European colonialism and its effects on its victims.

I had to buy this book a little while back for a European history class, and I am very glad to have read it. While I don't claim to be particularly knowledgeable about western philosophy / history, Cesaire's essay stands alone with its extremely powerful statements and descriptions that are made so memorable by the poetic style of this essay. It's a scathing analysis of the concept of civilization vs savagery, and the inherent racism and hypocrisy in western societies, and that Cesaire references so many philosophers really emphasizes how the evolution of thought in the west has inevitably led to so much of the brutality and tragedy through the 20th century. Don't just take this as a socialist bashing the bourgeoisie, because Discourse on Colonialism really is an eye opener and is sure to invoke a reaction out of the reader.

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