

WAITING WITH FANON

By

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In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes of waiting in a room with no lights. The cinema. In Martinique he wasn't plagued with anxiety. That would come later, when he went to the cinema in France. In Martinique all the patrons were Black like him. They could all be Tarzan. But when he saw the same film in a French theater the earth gave way beneath him. He was not Tarzan anymore. He was just another native being mauled. The film ended. The credits rolled. A blizzard of faces, pink and pointed, lit the theater and in their eyes he died again. Waiting in a theater for his image to appear on screen was never the same after France.

Black life under COVID is lived in a Fanonian moment where you wait to appear on the screen; a slow drip of days where you wonder into which kind of death you will be cast. No seat in the theater allows you to assume the desire of your killers. No white masks for you to wear. If you are lucky you live under a roof and have some food. You fix oatmeal or fried eggs in lieu of the popcorn you ate before the pandemic, when you could *drive* to the cinema to watch yourself die. In lieu of celluloid you now download the lethal consumption of your flesh. Here's a synopsis of two new films, *The Prison* and *The City*; and a rerun titled, *Care & Cure*.

The Prison: starring Black women, a demographic more likely than any other group to fight COVID-19 from within a cage due to their overabundance in pre-trial detention. 80% of them are primary caretakers, meaning their families inherit their heightened risk of infection.

The City: featuring COVID-19 epicenters, cities with high concentrations of Black people: Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans, etc. In Chicago, Blacks comprise 30% of the population and 70% of those who died from COVID-19. Black people comprise 14% of the country's population and 33% of COVID-19 deaths.

Care & Cure: the story of intergenerational DNA damage. Starring Black women, who are 60% more likely to have high blood pressure than Whites, and Black men who are 80% more likely to have diabetes than Whites. Co-starring White doctors refusing to treat Black patients, inflicting sterilization without consent, injecting syphilis into Black men's veins. But the film ends on a redemptive note. "Today, health care has evolved," the narrator proclaims. "The COVID-19 vaccine you will get is the same vaccine sluicing through the veins of White Americans. No more, 'Uncle Johnny was fine but he went to the doctor and everything went downhill.' This time it will be different. Trust us."

Evening comes and you tell yourself you've done enough waiting with Fanon. Tomorrow you will be Tarzan. You will be Jane. You'll swing from tree to tree and land on the capital's steps. Together, with all the people you were when you were a child, you'll storm the building, ululating your demands for the end of Shelter-in-Place. In this film you're not a native and you never die.