## **Contrary to what we’ve been told, space is really white. We can only understand our present relation to space as a manifestation of the white, settler-colonial fantasies**

**McKinson** **2020** (Kimberley D.- assistant professor of anthropology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY). “Do Black Lives Matter in Outer Space?” Sapiens, September 30, 2020 <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/space-colonization-racism/> )

Though SpaceX is a private company with its sights fixated on colonizing an ecology beyond the bounds of Earth’s atmosphere, it is nonetheless implicated in these contestations about racism. **Space exploration is not and has never been politically neutral.**

As the history of the space race shows, **the dream of colonizing space has always been tied to narratives about domination and greatness. In the U.S., the historic NASA workforce has largely been White and male.** As writer Mark Dery noted in a groundbreaking essay about Afrofuturism, **such men seem to believe they possess the power to design, own, and control “the unreal estate of the future.”**

**These narratives are not unlike the ones of Euro-American colonization and imperialism on Earth, which are stories of the exploitation, exclusion, and dehumanization of Black people, other people of color, and Indigenous people in the name of exploration, adventure, and expansion by White peopl**e.

Today the scions of space colonization are the billionaire entrepreneurs who have founded commercial spaceflight companies—Musk (SpaceX), Jeff Bezos (Blue Origin), and Sir Richard Branson (Virgin Galactic). In other words, they are no longer political leaders from ideologically opposed nation-states, as they were during the Cold War. They are still, however, privileged and wealthy White men. (The combined net worth of Musk, Bezos, and Branson is over US$273 billion.)

**Their endeavors to colonize Mars and their fantasies for the future of humankind must be understood in the context of the racialized histories of colonization on Earth**.

## **18 of the over 550 people who have gone to space are black, zero of which came from African nations. The number of non-white people who have been to space is also quite small. If ever there was a topic that could be described as 'white people problems' it's this.**

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## **Even when we imagine space in popular media, we imagine it as white. There is not a single black person in Logan’s Run and Blade Runner, and there are only 3 of note across 10 different Star Wars films. In other words, we even imagine the future as white.**

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## **Afrofuturism provides not only an alternative vision but a means of empowerment for those who are left out of our present collective imaginations.**

**Taylor-Stone 2014** (Chardine - founder of black speculative fiction book club Mothership Connections. She is a member of Writers of Colour, plays drums in black feminist punk band Big Joanie and is currently in her final year studying for a BA (Hons) Arts and Humanities at Birkbeck, January 7 “Afrofuturism: where space, pyramids and politics collide” The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2014/jan/07/afrofuturism-where-space-pyramids-and-politics-collide>)

**In times of economic and political crisis popular culture tends to turn to the fantastical, providing an escape from the harsh realities of life.** However, what is usually represented as Utopian in mainstream science fiction is often culturally European with a story that frequently revolves around a white male character. Even when depicting "multiracial" future societies, culturally the tropes of that imagined culture are regularly not representative of the races seen. If we accept that all humanity will be present in the future, why is it that non-European cultures seem to disappear once we get through the Earth’s atmosphere?

In 1993, Mark Dery created the term **Afrofuturism** to describe science fiction by African-American writers such as Samuel R Delany and Octavia Butler, whose work "treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriate images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future". The term **is now used to describe works that explore black experience in the science-fiction genre**. However the ideas and aesthetics that form Afrofuturism go back further than the work of these authors, with Afrofuturist elements being found in music, art and film. **Afrofuturism also goes beyond spaceships, androids and aliens, and encompasses African mythology and cosmology with an aim to connect those from across the Black Diaspora to their forgotten African ancestry.**

If there was ever a figure who was the embodiment of Afrofuturism it would be Jazz musician, Sun Ra, although to place him within the borders of a musical genre does not do him justice as an artist. With no legal birth certificate, it is believed he was born in the Jim Crow state of Alabama. Sun Ra created a mythical, ethereal persona that merged science fiction with Egyptian mysticism, producing an otherworldliness that matched the music he made from the 50s to his death in 1993. Adding to his legend, he also claimed to not be of this Earth, explaining:

I never wanted to be a part of planet Earth, but I am compelled to be here, so anything I do for this planet is because the Master-Creator of the Universe is making me do it. I am of another dimension. I am on this planet because people need me.

## **The word ‘appropriation’ in the topic has no qualifier, so to affirm the topic is to reject all forms of appropriation of outer space, both the physical form that the aff rejects, but also the cultural-psychic appropriation of space as a conceptual device that Afrofuturism takes. The only appropriation of space that is possible in our anti-Black world is as an imaginary place or as a conceptual device. Afro-futurism offers a possibility to subvert the traditionally white realm of space through a reimagining and appropriation of the past, present, and future of Black people.**

**Mosaic Theater 2021** (February 16, “What is the Space of Afrofuturism?” <https://mosaictheater.org/blog/what-in-the-space-is-afrofuturism>)

This is no small task. However, **the hunger for new Afrofuturistic narratives is clear as undeniable**. Black Panther is the ninth highest grossing movie of all time (third highest grossing movie when just looking at US and Canadian audiences). **These stories expand the scope of the questions we ask and push the boundary of what we have considered.**

Now, even if you haven’t heard the term Afrofuturism, I’d be willing to bet you’re familiar with it. Ever heard of Sun Ra? Janelle Monae? Octavia Butler? How about Marvel’s Black Panther?

These are all interpretations of what Afrofuturism is, because **the true center of Afrofuturism is the simple question of “what could be”. Scott Woods goes on to call it “a hope engine;” a way of asking folks how they see themselves in the future.** And the artists working in this medium have myriad answers.

**Afrofuturism looks to the past and present to imagine a future that resists systems of oppression.**

It is a cultural aesthetic as well as a philosophy of science and history that was coined in 1993 by Mark Dery in his essay “Black to the Future,” as a term to describe this specific artistic and social movement that spans much of recent history.

**The origins of science fiction lie in the exploration of “otherness” but Afrofuturism turns this function on its head and imagines a future designed by and for the traditional “other.”**

By incorporating themes and concerns from the African diaspora, Afrofuturism functions as “an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation,” as Ytasha L. Womack describes it in her 2013 book Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture.

**Much like historical realism is often used to critique contemporary political or social situations without quagmiring the artists and audience in their own misfortune, Afrofuturism is often used to explore the intersectionality of feminism, alienation, and community while also allowing moments of escapism, idealisation, and celebration. Afrofuturism is a means of reclaiming agency over one’s narrative. It is a way of celebrating a history and culture that were stolen and deliberately rubbed out. Afrofuturism explores themes relevant to the lived realities of Black people in the past and present outside dominant cultural narratives. It strives to dissociate Black experiences from the context of white supremacy.**

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## **Thus, I advocate for the appropriation of outer space by Afrofuturist entities as a means to critically interrogate and undermine the whiteness of space.**

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## **We should embrace the appropriation of our understanding of space as our present moment, in the wake of the BLM protests and a global attempt to reckon with race, offers an opportunity to reimagine space and to sever it from its white supremacist ties.**

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By dislodging U.S. space exploration from the realm of fantasy, Scott-Heron reminds his audience that, to the contrary, the social priorities that fueled the Apollo program and American space conquest—as envisaged by “Whitey”—were deeply implicated in Black socioeconomic dispossession and racial inequality.

**Moments after the SpaceX astronauts left the Earth behind, Trump’s words rang out: “Space travel is not a feat of engineering alone. It’s also a moral endeavor—a measure of a nation’s vision, its willpower, its place in the world.”**

**In a post-Floyd world,** the U.S. will undoubtedly have to forcefully confront the ways in which she has failed to measure up to her highest moral ideals. And yet **this moment also presents the opportunity to reevaluate our collective principles to articulate once again our vision for the future,** both here on Earth and **in outer space.**

Will this be a future equitable for all? Will it be one predicated not on Black alienation but on Black reclamation, one invested not in the fragmentation of Black people and their histories but in the project of making them whole? Will those in the U.S. be bold enough to envision such an Afro-future?

**It is such a future**—brilliantly depicted and embraced by numerous generations of African American literary, musical, and visual artists—**that fills me with a child-like sense of wonder, much like how I felt when I first discovered Our Universe. It is in this future, that I, a Black woman, would like to make my home.**

## **Solvency cards**

## **Don’t just write this off as meaningless art, science fiction, and, more generally, our imagination plays a role in helping shape our future**

**Yongo 2014** ​​[Micah - writes about creativity, literature, culture and film. He is part of the Writers of Colour collective and has been published at mediadiversified.org. He can be found at his blog Thoughthouse. “What is Afrofuturism?” Media Diversified January 1, 2014 <https://mediadiversified.org/2014/01/01/what-is-afrofuturism/>]

You need only cast a quick glance over the considerable career of someone like Isaac Asimov to note the prescient, directive power of science-fiction. The man who coined both the word and idea of robotics in his classic I, Robot and, in his 1964 article, Visit to the World’s Fair of 2014, foresaw everything from kitchen top coffee makers and microwave meals to satellite phones.

And then consider that Asimov’s predictions, as impressive as they were, cannot even be considered unusual amongst the sci-fi writing intelligentsia. Ray Bradbury prefigured the advent of earphones in his best known novel, Fahrenheit 451. Whilst HG Wells, as far back as 1899, was imagining automatic doors in The Sleeper Awakes. In fact, everything from bionic limbs (The Six Million Dollar Man) to credit cards (Edward Bellamy’s 1888 novel, Looking Backwards), to the now commonplace Skype-style video calling we all use and love has been prophesied one way or another by the heady imaginations of science-fiction. And that’s before we even get into how much of our everyday vernacular is co-opted from the oft quoted but rarely read (and yes, I have read it) George Orwell classic, 1984– terms like ‘big brother,’ ‘doublethink’ ‘newspeak’ ‘thought-crime’ (none of which will trigger your present day spellchecker) were all coined in a book authored in 1949, a full two decades before CCTV made its first appearance in the 70s, and over half a century before Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and the pervasive surveillance culture that’s now so much a part of our world.We may as well call proponents of science-fiction ‘seers’ as well as writers, so often have their speculations foreshadowed, and in many cases shaped, the future reality. All that being said, at its heart sci-fi has always been about more than gadgets and technology. It’s a vehicle through which men and women have not just imagined the future, but also used those imaginations to critique the landscape of the present day (hence the often dystopian bent). **The science-fiction genre is a** domain of elaborate thought experiments. It **means to do more than entertain, it seeks to show the world to us, one step removed, unveiled and refracted through the dark mirror of hyper-reality, and therefore beyond the apathy-inducing lens of what is familiar. It’s perhaps because of this that Ray Bradbury once called it,**

***“The most important literature in the history of the world, because it’s the history of ideas… central to everything we’ve ever done.”***

And he’s kind of right. In generations long gone by our parables were hidden in aural traditions and fables, everything from Hans Christian Andersen, to Aesop, to Plato, Homer and back to the earliest cave drawings have carried their own polemic thrust. Our stories were ‘once upon a time’ then, hearkening back to fantastical histories in search of compass and roadmap for the realities of the present day. But since the forward-hurtling train the industrial revolution put us on, and the way technology has since quickened and enlarged the shifts between one generation and the next, the past has become a venerable though antiquated stranger, foggy and mysterious and hard to call to mind. In the words of bestselling science fiction novelist, William Gibson,

*“It’s harder to imagine the past that went away than it is to imagine the future.”*

All of which has meant one simple thing: **the tales that now tell what’s wrong or right about how things are – our modern day myths, so to speak – no longer speak of what used to be, they envision what is still yet to come.** And so it’s for this reason it’s somewhat alarming to find that **for the most part science-fiction**, at least until very recently, **has been dominated by just one particular kind of imagined future**. Gibson elaborates that,

*“It seemed to me that* ***mid-century mainstream American science-fiction had often been triumphalist and militaristic, a sort of folk propaganda for American exceptionalism.*** *I was tired of America-as-the-future, the world as a white monoculture, the protagonist as a good guy from the middle class or above. I wanted there to be more elbow room.”*

## **The science fiction that typifies Afrofuturism is uniquely important in challenging master narratives and envisioning a Black future.**

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And more elbow room is exactly what certain parts of sci-fi, and afrofuturism in particular, has been trying to shoulder its way into for the last twenty years. Nnedi Okorafor, author of the award winning The Shadow Speaker (2007), notes that

***“Science fiction is the only genre that enables African writers to envision a future from our African perspective.”***

Which is a big deal. Because let’s face it, **the co-opting of Africa’s future isn’**t exactly **a new or rare practice**. Without getting into the hoary, knotty tangles of 19th & 20th century (French, Dutch, Belgian, Portuguese and British) colonialism, even since the many (apparent) liberations and independences of sub-Saharan Africa the narrative for what the continent is and ought to be has been written by everyone from Joseph Conrad (see his 1902 short novel Heart of Darkness, and Chinua Achebe’s critique of it) to Ernest Hemingway to CNN. With added emphasis on the latter, because the outsider’s perspective assumed by most western media is an issue, one acknowledged by Komla Dumor, a Ghanaian correspondent for the BBC, who recently lamented the media’s failure to recognise that any ‘expert’ analysis of Africa must come from its inhabitants, and not news organisations who’ve “[flown] in a correspondent to tell you what’s happening by looking out of [their] hotel window.” This kind of thing is why Kenyan film director Wanuri Kahiu says,

*“we’ve never had a chance to talk about our own history, it’s always been written by other people.”*

And this, also, is why **afrofuturism is** so important. The term was coined by the American author and critic, Mark Dery, in 1993, who correctly saw the genre as **the perfect vehicle to narrate the African-American experience, an experience of those who were and are**

***“the descendants of alien abductees; [inhabiting] a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements [whilst] official histories undo what has been done.”***

**Dery saw the subversive, outsider** oeuvre of **sci-fi as** ripe for both **“asserting [the African-Americans’] presence in the present and [making] clear they intend to stake their claim in the future.”**

It’s this impetus to do so that Dery identified in the writings of Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delaney and Charles Saunders, as well as spying incarnations of afrofuturism beyond literature in Jimi Hendrix’s Electric Ladyland, Bernie Worrell’s Blacktronic Science and George Clinton’s Computer Games, a sort of technocultural funk meme that’s found continuance in the innovative sounds of Janelle Monae, Outkast and others. But **today afrofuturism is** broader than this, reaching beyond Dery’s initial remit to encompass writers from the continent of Africa as well as those of its diaspora, seeking to explore, in the words of artist and educator, Denenge Akpem, **“what blackness could look like in the future”. And it’s this exploration that undergirds the genre’s import,** and makes the work of writers like Nnedi Okorafor, Lauren Beukes, Sarah Lotz, Clifton Gachagua and Steve Barnes worth supporting even beyond the merits of their talent. Because **science-fiction of all kinds** – of which afrofuturism is one – **has proven over and over again its ability to set the frame for how we envision the future,** and as Zimbabwean author and publisher, Ivor Hartmann, puts it

**“If you can’t see and relay an understandable vision of the future, your future will be co-opted by someone else’s vision, one that will not necessarily have your best interests at heart.”**