



andré m. carrington

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THE FUTURE OF RACE IN SCIENCE FICTION

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The Future of Race in Science Fiction

andré m. carrington



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We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand
on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

—**LANGSTON HUGHES**

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INTRODUCTION

The Whiteness of Science Fiction and the Speculative Fiction of Blackness

THE POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR MY RESEARCH on speculative fiction (SF) was a desire to spark informed dialogue that would build on the lessons I have learned from critical reflections on literature and media, while also making the concerns that animate my career as a Black intellectual more legible within these conversations. The tradition of intellectual inquiry into popular culture points toward speculative fiction as an exemplary venue for understanding how the production of literature and culture fits within the structure of societies in which it takes place. In particular, there has been a generation of cultural criticism published about the ways in which popular texts resonate with the interests of attentive, actively engaged fans and academic researchers concerned with gender, sexuality, class, national identities, and changing technologies. With deference to research in these areas, however, I have come to believe that scholarship does not yet provide all of the tools required to articulate what science fiction, fantasy, and utopia mean to Black Americans. Some of the most important questions that speculative fiction provokes for scholars who think, as I do, that race and racism should be paramount concerns in any inquiry into the relationship between popular culture and its social context are just beyond the reach of prevailing approaches to the genre. I intend to bring them closer.

The interest I take in SF texts and the ways in which I negotiate my role as a fan and critic of the genre are closely bound up with what it means for me to be Black and what it means for me to be an academic. This is a book about what speculative fiction, in the many ways we encounter it and embody it, has to say about what it means to be Black. It is also about how placing Blackness at the center of discussions about speculative fiction

augments our understanding of what the genre might be and what it might do. Authors and audiences from a variety of racial backgrounds have brought speculative fiction into being through production, consumption, representation, interpretation, and reception. In that process, we have refracted ideas of Blackness through the meaning-making conventions of the genre. This book examines those mediations of Blackness through the lens of genre, and it also interprets speculative fiction through the critical lens of Blackness.

In the chapters that follow, I have examined speculative fiction and media—novels, short fiction, memoirs, performance, film, television, comics, amateur publishing, and works circulated on the Internet—in accordance with the axiom that popular culture, broadly construed, plays a part in the social construction of identity. This book assays the notion that *race is socially constructed*, that its meaning is shaped by the habits of persons and institutions, by scrutinizing how *genre* functions as an organizing principle in the field of cultural production. I argue that the creative acts and interpretive structures through which authors, readers, fans, and critics have shaped the genre tradition of speculative fiction draw on the same deep well of thinking about race that influences other segments of cultural production. Speculative fiction is as saturated with race thinking as any other variety of popular culture, and it tends to reproduce conventional understandings of race for reasons I explore in this introduction and throughout the book. By analyzing works that represent the production and reception of speculative fiction, I also demonstrate that race thinking is a salient factor in the way actors on the media landscape employ genre distinctions and reproduce genre conventions in practice. Ultimately, I hope to establish a basis in the interpretation of popular culture for a more expansive understanding of what it means to be Black. I also hope to encourage SF readers and critics to acknowledge that race matters in speculative fiction; whether we realize it or not, our engagement with the genre entails a variety of complex relationships with Blackness.

In the first part of this introductory essay, I outline how I am deploying the notion of genre, how I have come to organize an expansive variety of texts for the purposes of this study, and why I am arguing that the field of cultural production is a significant place to look for evidence about racism and racial identity. Following this discussion, I examine some of the underlying assumptions regarding race that are typical in academic criticism published on speculative fiction. A significant strain of this writing compares the relative marginality of the genre within the field of literature

and literary study to racial subordination; that is, it consists of arguments that invoke racial segregation and discrimination as metaphors for the devaluation of speculative fiction as a tradition that has “less value” than conventional, literary fiction. Another major task among SF critics has been taking stock of the ways in which social differences like race provide the basis for the fictionalized configurations of identity (technological, superhuman, extraterrestrial, supernatural) that characterize the genre. Contrary to these long-standing tendencies to invoke race in metaphorical terms, I argue in this book that we ought to focus our critical attention on situations in which race thinking and speculative fiction converge on the meaning of Blackness as such.

To comprehend the significance of Blackness in speculative fiction and media, SF critics must cultivate and put into practice sophisticated approaches to understanding race that are relevant to the field of cultural production writ large as well as its social surroundings. Therefore *Speculative Blackness* is not just a study of how Black people are represented in a particular area of popular culture but also an examination of the ways in which Black people’s heterogeneous interests come to bear on the range of cultural endeavors in which we involve ourselves. Thus the last part of this introduction outlines how this book, in dialogue with recent scholarship, might further our appreciation for the ways in which Black authors, artists, and audiences have incorporated speculative fiction into the rich, dynamic reservoir of cultural practices on which we draw to fashion ourselves. In that respect, this project resonates deeply with the institutional and vernacular traditions of Black knowledge production.

The effort to bring together race-conscious cultural criticism and the study of speculative fiction is not a new endeavor. Before proceeding to the aforementioned discussion of previous studies that share my objective of speaking to the common interests of SF studies and critical thinking about Blackness, I will articulate how the way I portray speculative fiction in *Speculative Blackness* addresses the concerns of several fields: literary criticism, cultural studies, American studies, and African American studies. My research emerges out of a distinctly African Americanist and feminist practice of scholarship as well as my experiences as a fan. I align my analysis with certain prevailing tendencies and certain critiques in the aforementioned fields, which I acknowledge in turn; accordingly, I offer the present account of how my own perspective has taken shape as an invitation to my fellow scholars to read this book from many disciplinary locations.

Some readers may be surprised to find that this is not a study of Black science fiction. It is impossible to understand Blackness in and through the genre without substantial engagement with the work of Black authors. The approach I am taking pursues that task in a broad-based fashion, so it may seem to miss the trees for the forest. Specifically, the two undeniable stalwarts of Black science fiction, Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler, hardly appear in this book; this choice is deliberate, in light of the recognition that my comments on each of these writers would add little to the conversations initiated by other critics. For the most part, I have selected authors and works where they emblemize particular situations in the development of speculative fiction across media. Notwithstanding the ways in which every choice I have made in the course of this investigation reflects a strategic emphasis and countenances certain exclusions, the authors and works I address in this study compose no discernible canon formation, and I acknowledge that the perspective afforded by this approach is less than global. With its tentative approach to theorizing how cultural production structured by genre intersects with the social forces of racial identity and racism, this book rehearses the kind of interdisciplinary curiosity about Blackness and speculative fiction that I hope to stimulate among specialists in these topics and nonspecialists alike.

One more disclaimer: though there are no prerequisites to reading this book, the feminist science fiction movement became an invaluable source of mentoring throughout the course of my research. While scholars have derived considerable insight from the cyberpunk movement within science fiction, examining how it reflects changing relationships to technology and human subjectivity, the feminist SF movement antedates and supersedes many of the novel ideas ascribed to cyberpunk.¹ The historiography of these two movements provides a case study in how divergent critical priorities yield radically different lessons about literature's relationship to its social context. The watershed interventions of women and feminist authors between the late 1960s and 1980s fundamentally transformed the fantastic genres in ways that are significant for understanding the social underpinnings of popular culture writ large. The writings of Daphne Patai and Marlene Barr, in particular, made an indelible impact on my thinking about the social situations mediated by speculative fiction.² Like the authors on whose works they draw—including Pamela Zoline, Suzy McKee Charnas, Karen Joy Fowler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Jewelle Gomez—the aforementioned critics demonstrate how late-twentieth-century speculative fiction reverberates with the impact

of feminist movements. A thorough account of primary and secondary sources in feminist speculative fiction is beyond the scope of this book, but without them as a guide, it would be impossible for me to take part in the related work of cultivating speculative fiction as an archive for critical thinking about race.

Speculative Fiction and Media

I embarked on this project while I was an active participant in media fandom: the community of actively engaged audience members brought together by our vocal appreciation of popular texts, from comic books to television series. I had always enjoyed reading stories like those in Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, watching shows in the Star Trek franchise, collecting superhero comics, playing out utopian and dystopian scenarios in games, and seeing awesome special effects on film. My interest finally crystallized into a fascination in graduate school, when I became immersed in the writing and dissemination of fan fiction online. Fan culture cultivated my taste in texts even as it expanded the repertoire of practices in which those tastes found satisfaction. Once I was exposed to a great amateur author based on a common point of departure—reading her writing about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for instance—I was motivated to explore a wider range of source material she wrote about. I began reading *Superman* comic books again for the first time in years, for example, just to understand the basis for the fan fiction about the character. Cultivating a new investment in different source texts would, in turn, draw my attention to the work of other fans writing about them and to their other interests. In addition to shaping my reading habits, the diversity of pleasures I found in fandom encompassed a variety of creative practices. I found that it could be as gratifying to offer my services as a “beta”—a reader for a fan fiction work in progress—as it was to try my hand at crafting icons, the hundred-by-hundred-pixel avatars that represent users in online discussion forums. Despite our disparate levels of talent and devotion to any given pursuit, the pleasure of amateur creativity was often its own reward. Fandom also drives a “gift” economy in which participants exchange stories and artwork for favors and as tokens of friendship, and the relationships that people develop as fans can touch many areas in their lives. I would argue that attention to the forces shaping interpersonal and economic interactions, including race and racism, is as important to these relationships and transactions currently taking place online as they have

always been in other areas of everyday life, and this belief has led me to seek out evidence of how social relationships functioned in fan communities of previous generations.

My orientation toward speculative fiction grows from the bottom up—out of an experience with many texts and activities that I have begun to sketch and from which I will offer many examples throughout this book—rather than from the top down in the form of even a hypothetical definition. In lieu of a definition, then I can offer a concept of the genre that extends across media and a curiosity about experiences of reception, like mine and unlike mine, that extends across time and place. These analytical priorities have emerged from the distinctive strategies I have cultivated for framing what speculative fiction is—priorities that I share with some amateur and some professional aficionados of the genre. To elucidate how these analytical interests come to bear on this book, I explain how I have come to view genre and reception as categories of analysis, before broaching the questions that emerge when these topics enter into conversation with African Americanist thought and critical practice.

I apply the term *speculative fiction* to a very wide variety of works in this book, but one of the most informative sources of guidance in my explorations of the genre is the literary critical work of Samuel Delany. Other scholars have recognized the nearly singular contributions Delany has made to literature in the fantastic genres in a number of excellent studies.³ An exploration of Delany's fiction would not bring unique value to this book, but I cite some of his arguments here to illuminate topics of deep interest among SF readers and writers. Delany's writings on the category of the *paraliterary* have proven particularly relevant to my effort to interrogate the significance of genre. Encompassing horror, mystery, erotica, comics, and innumerable other forms, the paraliterary consists of a constellation of textual practices that we can distinguish from literature in terms of their ascribed intellectual value and their respective relationships to commerce. Delany argues, "The abyssal split between literature and paraliterature exists precisely so that some values can circulate across it and others can be stopped by it. . . . Just as (discursively) homosexuality exists largely to delimit heterosexuality and to lend it a sense of definition, paraliterature exists to delimit literature and provide it with an equally false sense of itself."⁴ This suggestive comparison reminds us that discursive categories—gay and straight, literary and paraliterary—are populated through material processes. The category of literature is full of objects with many differences from one another, but it appears more cohesive when it is compared in the aggregate to the comic books,

pornographic magazines, and descriptive texts from museum placards that reside together on the paraliterary side of the division. To the extent that the disparate objects in the latter category are not literature, they need not be similar in their qualities to share the term paraliterary as a description of the *function* they share in the preceding comparison: they differ from literature. Their fictive coherence holds literature in place. Marking SF texts as paraliterary entails exercising a value judgment that separates them from literature; although I will interrogate this system of judgment in what follows, criticizing it does not necessarily yield much insight into texts themselves. Rather, building on Delany's suggestions, studying speculative fiction as a paraliterary phenomenon helps to illuminate the ways in which texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed.

Paraliterary texts are characteristically constrained by the marketplace. Their creation and reception depend on their cost, whereas literature sees its value defined and reproduced within institutions that are ostensibly less constrained by strictly economic imperatives, such as the university. Because of their material separation from literary texts, Delany suggests that critics "adopt a different methodology for studying paraliterature . . . by putting more emphasis on paraliterary genres as material productions of discourse. We need lots of biography, history, reader response research—and we need to look precisely at how these material situations influenced the way the texts (down to individual rhetorical features) were (and are) read."⁵ In my research, I explore written works of speculative fiction on this basis, while extending the same attentive consideration Delany recommends to other varieties of cultural production. In addition to print speculative fiction, I have looked to fanzines, media industry publications, and novelizations of works for the screen as examples of the kinds of texts that are produced in genre-specific ways. To the extent that they arise out of material processes related to the production of speculative fiction in print, these media also constitute integral components of the SF genre, in my view. Extrapolating from this concept of an expansive print culture and economic structure supporting the production and consumption of speculative fiction as a paraliterary phenomenon in print, I have outlined how visual and performance media partake in race thinking through their iterations of the genre conventions of speculative fiction, as well. Therefore the term *genre* never denotes a medium-specific mode of analysis in this book but instead refers to the ways in which meaning making takes place on similar terms across media. Genre is not a property intrinsic to a text, for my purposes, but a condition *and a product* of interpretation.

The eclectic assemblage of works that represent the SF genre within this book have some common themes. Many of the works I examine take place in imaginary settings that rewrite history or posit possible future worlds. Most of them invoke premises that run counter to existing scientific evidence—for example, extraterrestrial civilizations in contact with humans, supernatural abilities, time travel—among the indispensable elements of their stories. These tropes emerge out of a common repository of ideas rooted in the long, complex history of speculative fiction, and *Speculative Blackness* emphasizes the historically contingent and interconnected cultural processes that have shaped that body of knowledge to appraise its social significance.

By recognizing the images of Blackness that speculative fiction disseminates as embedded in, rather than separated from, the same discursive terrain as other representations of racial identity, I take seriously the notion that popular culture plays a role in mediating racial politics. In addition, I would argue that the stakes of cultural politics in our lives motivates Black readers and viewers to engage with popular culture from an ostensibly “political” position, embracing, in effect, a practical consciousness regarding how our creative and interpretive efforts in relation to media come freighted with hazards (such as playing into stereotypes) as well as opportunities. Critical approaches to literature and media show us how culture can mystify and demystify social relations; when it comes to identity, in particular, cultural production can propagate ideas with profound implications for the intellectual, emotional, and economic lives of individuals and social groups. Literary and paraliterary texts function as historical evidence and fodder for argumentation, and along with other mediations, they posit ideas through which we comprehend our place in the world. Thus I will argue neither that speculative fiction is tantamount to canonical literature in this book nor that every media text I examine functions in ways that are identical with the paraliterary phenomena I draw into discussion. Instead, I am confronting the conundrum of genre as one that attains distinctive social significance and legibility through its coherence as something less than wholly literary but also more expansive than print media.

Reception and Fan Cultures

Research on literature and media has long acknowledged how audiences make use of the meanings available to the texts they consume in diverse,

sometimes unanticipated ways. By considering readers and viewers as active participants in the construction of meaning, I am joining my efforts to scholarship that explores fan cultures as a source of knowledge about how the ideologies on display in popular texts resonate with the public. Attention to the domain of reception is vital to assessing how race thinking pertains to speculative fiction, because it is in the shared, contested space of the audience that the artifacts of the genre's production are translated into use. An interpretive apparatus that spans everything from the language of film reviews to the aesthetic values outlined in fan letters, all of which, I argue, comprise inextricable aspects of speculative fiction, allows the genre to function as a sounding chamber for the ideas of the people who engage with it.

Speculative Blackness builds on two of the major lines of inquiry produced by scholarship on SF audiences in the past. First, a large body of writing on the history and political economy of print science fiction details how readers occasionally enjoy successful efforts to publish science fiction writing of their own, on an amateur and professional basis. In turn, science fiction writers who were once fans often engage in sustained communication with their readership. These patterns are also typical in the comic book industry. The idea of "going pro" over the course of a career in science fiction and comics is a powerful narrative within these segments of popular culture. It reminds us that authors are always readers, and perhaps more importantly, readers are also viewers, listeners, moviegoers, and embodied actors. In other words, every interpretive act is an act of authorship, and every act of authorship is an act of interpretation. As is the custom when we read one another's work as scholars, I consider the texts produced by amateurs and professionals alike throughout this study as "readings," using that term to connote an active process that produces meaningful textual evidence. One of the aims of my research is to illuminate the way race thinking persists across the continuum between professionals and amateurs in the production of speculative fiction.

The second of the major itineraries within the study of popular media reception that my research follows is a commitment to critical thinking about gender and sexuality. The two groundbreaking studies of fan culture that emerged at the end of the 1980s, Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* and Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, made a lasting impression on subsequent scholarship, thematically as well as methodologically. Both studies focused extensively on the well-developed subcultures of Star Trek fans, and both placed questions of women, gender, and sexuality at the

forefront of their analyses. These emphases have remained prominent in studies of television audiences, which have been illuminated further by researchers like David Morley, Ien Ang, John Fiske, and Herman Gray. As Constance Penley and Joanna Russ demonstrated in work that was roughly contemporaneous with the aforementioned studies of fandom, audience members' priorities persist across media. We come to texts not only as consumers in a marketplace but with a multiplicity of interests informed by our subjective desires and shared paradigms of identification in relation to the culture around us. According to Penley and Russ, conceptualizing narrative possibilities beyond the limits of patriarchy and heterosexual romance was important to viewers of speculative fiction-themed television series, just as the pioneering research of Janice Radway had shown it to operate in women's readings of mass-market romance novels. Scholarship on fandom thus arrived at gender and sexuality as salient categories of analysis that were integral to understanding the phenomenon of genre. These factors proved to be instrumental in the way audiences experience texts, and I continue to value them in my research.

Attention to race has been comparatively muted in the analysis of speculative fiction's fan cultures, but some innovative works on the history of speculative fiction have interrogated the role of race thinking in the production of the texts in the genre. Studies like Isiah Lavender's *Race in American Science Fiction* situate racial science, including eugenics and social Darwinism, in the background of twentieth-century science fiction writing. Research into this area helps elucidate the White supremacist narratives that have played out in genre fiction as well as science. Similarly, in *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, John Rieder traces the paradigm of subjection that recurs frequently in fictitious accounts of space exploration to the "colonial gaze" that originally took shape in travel writing. As imperialists scoured the globe for resources to exploit, they also cultivated religious, psychological, and anthropological tendencies that asserted the primacy and superiority of their own identities; across disciplines, scholars have come to describe these perspectives as "Eurocentric." Rieder uses the notion of the colonial gaze to discuss how the Eurocentric outlook became a reliable feature of literary and paraliterary texts that posit encounters with unfamiliar peoples. Accounts of the relationship between science, popular culture, and everyday life, like Penley's *NASA/Trek* and DeWitt Kilgore's *Astrofuturism*, also highlight how institutions concerned with scientific knowledge tend to reinforce certain privileged social and political prerogatives over others. Penley and Kilgore situate

the genre of speculative fiction in relation to other venues through which the nonspecialist public engages with scientific discourse, like education and news media. Like the preceding authors, I have chosen to excavate exchanges of meaning between people and across discursive fields in this book, because the science in speculative fiction, the social relations it envisions, the questions about human nature it poses, and the workings of media and culture it demonstrates are all shaped by their institutional contexts.

This book diverges from previous studies that have focused on fandom insofar as it emphasizes reception as a source of knowledge about texts and their uses—about the “life” of texts—in the *past*. By treating texts published in the past as though they were once “living” things with meanings shaped by active interpretation, even though they may be at rest in the contemporary moment, I am working toward what Delany calls “a *sophisticated* awareness of the values already in circulation among the readership at the time these works entered the public market.”⁶ Working and playing on the cultural terrain of their own eras, the makers and users of speculative fiction in other times have prioritized the concerns of their respective historical moments and reflected on their social contexts from vantage points grounded in the situations in which they lived. Studies like *Fan Cultures* by Matt Hills and *Cyberspaces of Their Own* by Rhiannon Bury refer to fan cultures as vernacular intellectual spaces in which audience members interrogate the dilemmas of everyday life using the resources of popular culture. These works demonstrate that as the means of producing and disseminating popular culture undergoes transformation, the terms of participation in fan culture and sharing interpretations shift, as well. When interpreting contemporary works, it is important to attend to information-age considerations of identification and anonymity, commerce, and access, as they affect how popular narratives circulate today. For the same reasons, however, invoking questions germane to other publishing technologies, other configurations of the legal and political landscape, and other conditions of reception helps us to understand texts produced at prior moments in history, and I have worked to reconstruct these considerations appropriately in the book.

Racism and the Field of Cultural Production

As I have indicated, speculative fiction provides us with a multifaceted glimpse into the popular imagination because it operates in virtually all

media and is handled by audiences with disparate interests. However, the fact that it is a *cultural* phenomenon means that the conclusions about social relations and politics we can draw from it are somewhat limited in scope. Throughout this study, I characterize works in the genre in terms of mediation rather than considering them reflections of reality. Understood as a force that mediates between one domain and another, culture can determine the way in which we conceptualize the world in which we live, and it can function as an index of what we do. I hardly intend to portray anything taking place within cultural production as the basis for a total account of how racial power functions in social situations. I am arguing instead for a rigorous account of how race and racism shape developments within a significant segment of the field of cultural production itself.

For the purposes of this inquiry, what happens in the course of producing cultural texts is very meaningful and very political. Culture forms the basis of many people's livelihood and influences their quality of life, and it is the material out of which many people fashion very meaningful understandings of the conditions in which they live. In framing cultural matters as distinct aspects of human experience, but not so distinct that they are entirely impertinent to understanding other dimensions of society, I am echoing approaches to culture that have shown themselves to be relevant across the humanities and social sciences, including Western Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism. In addition, intellectuals who do not affiliate themselves with the aforementioned schools of thought have enunciated understandings of culture that are indispensable to my analysis. It would be digressive to reiterate the debates that the aforementioned scholarly traditions have inspired, but to devote the remainder of this introduction to explaining how I have chosen to stage the encounter between race and genre as categories of analysis, I address a number of the most pronounced influences on my discussion of the field of cultural production in this book.

In the twentieth century, European and American Marxist critics extended critiques of capitalism that had developed to analyze the rise of industrial labor and its impact on society to the field of culture. From the politicized understanding of the changing nature of cultural texts posited by Walter Benjamin to the rise of cultural studies in the United Kingdom, the successive articulation of new questions about the production and use of culture has yielded ample resources for inquiry into social change. The advancement of capitalism has changed culture in ways that

have demanded new approaches to understanding its significance for the working class, the middle class, and culture workers, in particular. I would add that as these schools of thought emerged to illuminate culture in industrial and metropolitan societies, Eastern Bloc, postcolonial, and Third World intellectuals responded to them from critical paradigms of their own, some of whom drew on knowledge that antedates scholarship in the United States and Western Europe. To this day, every struggle over education, participation in the arts, the representation and performance of racial identity, and the dissemination of ideas about race demonstrates the urgency of what we may call cultural politics for people whose lives are profoundly impacted by racism. Thus, though they are not often explicitly in conversation with these movements, the work of contemporary African Americanist critics like bell hooks, Houston Baker, and Hortense Spillers, for example, builds on a long tradition of politicizing aesthetics as a central prerogative of Black artistic and intellectual practice. Criticism in this vein often cites evidence within Black vernacular expression and everyday life to corroborate its theoretical insights.

The peculiar status of Blackness in the popular culture of societies like the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrates the need for a nuanced understanding of the political dimension of culture. Stuart Hall points out a fruitful but contradictory aspect of this situation. “Within culture,” Hall writes, “marginality, though it remains peripheral to the broader mainstream, has never been such a productive space as it is now.”⁷ Hall argues that approaches to Blackness in popular culture are incomplete if they only pursue negative critiques of the way dominant narratives facilitate racial marginalization, because creativity has also thrived in conditions of subordination. Every cultural form invented by Black people in diaspora, from the sorrow songs to break dancing, demonstrates complex and potentially liberatory uses of existing cultural forms. Through the force of these cultural interventions, Black subjects have come to emblemize the generative quality of marginality in the popular imagination. Therefore Black subjects are not necessarily rendered invisible in popular culture by racial subordination, but perhaps unsurprisingly, neither are the lived circumstances of being Black—including practices of coping with and defying racial oppression—meaningfully integrated throughout the field of cultural production. Literature, education, media, and the art world are structured in ways that tend to reproduce meanings of Blackness that are amenable to prevailing racial ideologies, but when authors, artists, and critics infuse their work with critiques of how cultural production

recapitulates exploitative dynamics in society, they may find ways to repudiate those systems, as well.

It is important to acknowledge that the range of meanings Blackness attains in culture does not consist of just two positions: capitulation or resistance. In Hall's words, to assume as much would leave us "trapped in that endless either/or, either total victory or total incorporation, which almost never happens in cultural politics, but with which critics always put themselves to bed."⁸ For critics whose curiosity propels them through the either–or of cultural politics, marginality and popularity can coincide as names for multiple facets of the same cultural phenomenon. This is especially true for works of genre fiction, which are both deeply invested in market imperatives that buttress the existing social order and, occasionally, more imaginative or diversionary than texts that present realistic treatments of everyday life. The meaning of the term popular in popular culture, Hall reminds us, evokes "its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people."⁹ As those experiences, pleasures, memories, and traditions vary, the range of lessons we can learn from them proliferates, as well.

In some respects, speculative fiction appears to offer an exemplary case study on the people-oriented sense of the "popular" in popular culture because of the formative role that fans have played in its development. The history of the genre attests to generations of fans parlaying their amateur ardor into professional success: Donald Wollheim founded a national organization for science fiction fans and went on to become an influential editor at Ace Books; Dwayne McDuffie and Devin Grayson were dedicated fans long before they became comic book writers. From the professional side of the genre, writers like Harlan Ellison and Joanna Russ, as well as actors and filmmakers involved in productions like the *Star Wars* series and *Doctor Who*, maintained active relationships with the audiences of their works as their careers flourished. Despite the relative openness of the genre toward the modal member of its audience, a sustained examination of participatory traditions in speculative fiction shows that they were not cultivated in dialogue with democratizing or reparative movements among people of color. With references to the feminist SF movement throughout the book, I will underscore this argument: participatory culture can engage specific marginalized segments of the public only when it responds to their critiques in ways that also acknowledge these communities' interests beyond the field of cultural production.

For decades, the work of antiracist activists and Black intellectuals has shown the value of distinguishing between the desire to cast off the vestiges of racial bigotry and the concerted effort required to undermine racist systems. Although the genre may appear to open up certain avenues of creativity to any given person, it should not be surprising that speculative fiction has not emerged as a paradigmatic source for examples of transformative engagement in cultural production by people of African descent when compared, for example, to memoir, or social dance, or lyric poetry. Rather than treating disparities between the Black presence within speculative fiction and the latter traditions of cultural practice as indicators of racially specific or medium-specific aptitudes, I would argue that these divisions reflect learned habits and acquired tastes. As a critic, following in a scholarly tradition that reaches back to the work of structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, I am inclined to treat habits and tastes as profoundly social in nature. Our dispositions toward culture grow out of individual and collective lived experience, material conditions, and historical processes. This book outlines some racialized patterns in the production and interpretation of speculative fiction to discern the material implications of the fact that the genre has come to mean different things for different people.

Another way of framing what I have said is that people mean different things for different genres. Black people's significance for speculative fiction—and sometimes our alienation from it—can be the point of departure for understanding in a more profound way what genre has to do with racial identity. Individuals' racial backgrounds shape their perspectives on reading and authorship, to be sure, but perhaps more importantly, whole segments of society experience genre traditions in different ways according to their sense of how these mediations pertain to their lives and the lives of others. In fields like African American studies, those of us who rely on culture as a source of evidence have honed our attention to practices embedded in Black communities—blues, jazz, improvisation, and orality, to name a few—because observing what is said and done through these modes of cultural production helps us to catalog the various and changing iterations of Blackness. Conversely, comparatively few versions of what it means to be Black have emerged from areas of cultural endeavor, like the scientific profession, that have proven indifferent or inimical to the influence of cultural practices typically associated with Blackness. The situations that find expression in speculative fiction and the economic, political, and intellectual currents that inspire Black cultural production seem to

pull apart the possible manifestations of Blackness and of speculative fiction, respectively. Where Blackness and speculative fiction come together, I would argue that the tendencies keeping them apart reemerge as two sides of the same coin: *the Whiteness of science fiction* and *the speculative fiction of Blackness*.

The Whiteness of Science Fiction

I am using the phrase rhetorically. The Whiteness of science fiction names both the overrepresentation of White people among the ranks of SF authors and the overrepresentation of White people's experiences within SF texts. I am intentionally using a positive rather than a negative formulation to discuss the issue of representation in this instance. While recognizing the "underrepresentation" of a minority group is a common heuristic for discussing racial exclusion, this negative critique can also mark the failure to acknowledge even the existence of Whiteness as a socially significant racial identity. Without making at least that much of a concession to antiracist ways of thinking, it is exceedingly hard for any analysis of cultural politics to consider issues of race in earnest. I would argue that an awareness of the problematic nature of Whiteness underlies many Black writers' approaches to working in the idiom of speculative fiction. One of the most recent scholars to speak to that awareness, DeWitt Douglas Kilgore, situates himself in relation to the Whiteness of science and science fiction at the outset of his book *Astrofuturism*:

I am also required to defend the right of African American scholars to range farther afield than our own backyards. . . . Given my history, my multiple-subject positions within the United States as a Midwestern, middle-class, college-educated African American male, what does it mean for me to be vulnerable to a genre produced primarily by and for affluent white men?¹⁰

Virtually every writer who brings up Blackness in speculative fiction confronts Kilgore's dilemma, and in so doing, we are always tacitly wrestling with the Whiteness of science fiction. For example, Charles Saunders, now a well-known Black writer of fantasy novels, attests to writing an essay titled "Why Blacks Don't Read Science Fiction" in the 1980s before coming to his current perspective on the genre, summarized in a piece called "Why Blacks Should Read (and Write) Science Fiction."¹¹ In an epilogue to one of the novels I discuss in this book, author Steven Barnes also chronicles his unlikely journey to identifying with science fiction as a Black

man by recounting the overwhelming prevalence of White heroes in the genre.¹² When Kilgore, in the aforementioned introduction to his book, sets up Black cultural critic Thulani Davis as his foil, he invokes an article she wrote in 1983 on the Whiteness of science fiction titled “The Future May Be Bleak, but It’s Not Black.” In a whimsical turn on this dilemma, Ron Eglash drew a diagram to illustrate the conceptual distance between stereotypes regarding the cultural caché of people of African descent and the “nerd” archetypes associated with science fiction in an essay on the topic.¹³ While Black SF writers may be comparatively rare, it is not so much the notion that Black people do not participate in speculative fiction at all that characterizes the genre. Rather, by highlighting the overrepresentation of Whiteness in the genre as the source of a problem, we can appreciate the way in which Black people who engage in speculative fiction experience the persistence of their minority status, at least affectively and psychologically. To apprehend the experience of being Black within a cultural context defined by Whiteness, we can invoke the signature question from W. E. B. Du Bois’s seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*: “How does it feel to be a problem?”

Each of the preceding narratives of alienation from speculative fiction by Black writers suggests that White people, in the aggregate, find representations of themselves in the genre to be much the same as they are elsewhere in culture: normative, benign, and frequent. This presumptive affinity for the imagery typically on display in popular culture is so thoroughly naturalized that it is often overlooked as a defining aspect of White privilege. A recent, exemplary book by Isiah Lavender titled *Race in American Science Fiction* militates against the notion that we ought to consider Blackness purely as an anomaly in the genre, but the back cover of the text communicates its theme in shorthand: “Blackness in a White Genre.” The Whiteness of science fiction and its function as a source of alienation for Black people has tremendous analytical value, if we are willing to think critically about it. To identify with Blackness in and through one’s relationship to science fiction entails seeing one’s racial background represented only rarely, typically at the margins, seldom in the person of an author, and awkwardly positioned as a consumer. The rare examples that break through this alienation—the literary success of Octavia Butler, the performance of Avery Brooks in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and the Black heroes who color the pages of some comic books—are the exceptions that prove the rule.

By identifying speculative fiction as a White cultural tradition, for analytical purposes, I am marking alienation as a signal feature of Black

experiences with the genre. Documenting the negative experiences of Black authors and audience members with the genre is a sensible task, but is not very instructive. One of the critical tendencies I have tried to avoid in this book is what the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick described as “paranoid reading,” a mode of interpretation that resembles the defensive apparatus individuals use to protect the integrity of the ego. Reading that can be described as paranoid values information, but it is not particularly curious about possibilities that it cannot anticipate. Paranoid reading is predisposed toward suspicion, it is reactionary, and it is mimetic—it takes on the qualities of its object and tries to subvert them. It relies on unmasking fraud and finding out betrayal as the means of proving itself right; I am particularly interested in moving beyond these gestures in some areas of this book. None of the aforementioned strategies encourage us to learn anything new, except perhaps who our enemies are; instead, they reinforce precepts that we already believe. To observe the bias toward paranoid reading in criticism, think about how often students are taught that the only valid way to distinguish their perspectives as scholars is to attack, take apart, resist, expose, and tear down other arguments.

Paranoid reading is so dominant that scholars of literature and culture tend to take it for granted as the only orientation toward forming an argument that merits consideration. All too often, we misrecognize the viable alternatives that sometimes present themselves to us. An example of a conventional, more paranoid interpretation that motivates me to think otherwise occurs in the opening lines from George Slusser’s essay in *Science Fiction, Canonization, Marginalization, and the Academy*. The collection, like this book, stages encounters between speculative fiction and knowledge projects concerned with race, class, gender, and sexuality (or multiculturalism):

The attitude of multiculturalists toward science fiction as a rule is either dismissive (it speaks for the dominant hegemonic class) or preemptory. In the latter sense, students are sent to find “minority” voices, and when these are not found, to do as Ursula K. Le Guin did in her *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* and invent them, incorporating writers by force under this heading whose stories do not conform to the generic expectations of the average reader.

This passage demonstrates a bias toward paranoid reading as the manner in which we criticize the priorities of other scholars as inadequate or mistaken to distinguish our own. Slusser’s response to Ursula K. Le Guin’s

editorial work is overdetermined by the notion that she must be doing a good thing badly, and it is loath to acknowledge the possibility that she might be doing a different thing altogether. Whatever Le Guin included in *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*, it was so problematic according to this reading that we don't even need to know what it is to discount her motives. Instead of engaging the reader in an evidence-based debate over whether certain works in the *Norton Book* define science fiction in a way that would strike the average reader as unusual—or engaging in the common and low-stakes debate about how we might define the genre differently—Slusser positions his interlocutor as an adversary. He subscribes her to a school of thought—the multiculturalists—whose motives are inherently suspect, whose aims are apparently retaliatory and unjustified, and whose methods are so inept that they rely on proverbial “force” rather than verbal acumen.

I would argue that Slusser misconstrued the object of his critique to position my own work in the company of Le Guin's anthology. The *Norton Book* actually offers little of evidence of Le Guin's commitment to “multiculturalism” in her career, which she demonstrates very substantially in her own writing. There are two Black writers in the *Norton Book* (Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler) and a few representatives of Native Americanist (Diane Glancy) and Africanist (Mike Resnick) themes.¹⁴ It is possible that the inclusion of these works might momentarily distract the reader from the otherwise consistent image of the Whiteness of science fiction that appears in the *Norton Book*, but overall, the collection simply does not pass muster as evidence of the challenge posed by ostensibly “multicultural” thinking to the conventional understanding of the genre. In my view, the *Norton Book* points the way toward how we might expand our concept of what speculative fiction does to dislodge Whiteness and patriarchy from the genre's identity. While it may stand out as a document of how feminist writers have worked to redefine the genre, it offers more evidence that the Whiteness of science fiction remains intact, with some gaps, than evidence that SF critics embraced multiculturalism.

With the *Norton Book*, Le Guin and her consulting editor, Karen Joy Fowler, were quite likely engaged in a mode of reading quite unlike the dismissive, retaliatory, and preemptory practice that Slusser ascribes to “multiculturalists.” Sedgwick calls this alternative strategy “reparative reading.” The basis for my associating Le Guin and Fowler with the task of reparation stems from their role as major figures in the feminist science fiction movement. I would suggest that like many writers in the

period, most notably Pamela Sargent, they conceptualized the collection they were editing as an opportunity to raise awareness about the increasing number of women publishing speculative fiction in the watershed of late-twentieth-century American feminism. Parity between the number of male and female authors included in the text coincided with an expanded range of styles and themes, as a major shift in the social groups from which authors emerge does for any body of literature. Presenting this account of who has written notable SF works does not in any way “forcefully” commit authors to a knowledge project against their will; indeed, it may not be about the authors at all. The contents of the *Norton Book* undo some of the exclusions that have limited the average reader’s presumptions about SF writing. Rather than conceptualizing this gesture as an affront, as Slusser seems inclined to do, I would portray it as a gift.

As Le Guin and Fowler, among other feminist SF writers, have done with respect to gender, I have tried to maintain a reparative orientation toward the Whiteness of science fiction throughout this book. In Sedgwick’s words, a reparative disposition stems from a subject’s recognition that “the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self.”¹⁵ A reparative reading acknowledges that the cultural field as it currently exists is full of undesirable eventualities and potential disappointments, because it accepts that the world is imperfect. The objective of a reparative knowledge project is not necessarily to forestall unpleasant surprises but to maintain the ability to keep itself intact in the face of the likelihood that some threats may indeed manifest. Sedgwick notes that efforts toward reparation can lead to unintended results, because their object, as it is made whole, may not look like “any preexisting whole.”¹⁶ In the context of a larger body of scholarship, including that of Sedgwick, José Muñoz, and Carolyn Dinshaw, interpretations that lend themselves to this description of reparative reading elaborate on the tradition of queer theory. I have sought out and welcomed this influence alongside that of feminist speculative fiction in this book.

It is my aim in *Speculative Blackness* to perform a bit of reparation on SF studies and Black cultural criticism. I am highlighting the Whiteness of science fiction as a point of departure toward a deeper understanding of how racism takes root within the field of cultural production, but this gesture toward problematic qualities that the genre has in common with much of its social context is not meant to be an indictment. By examining its shortcomings with respect to race thinking as one part of an effort to

comprehend the genre as an imperfect whole, I hope to stoke the reader's interest in the possibility that speculative fiction might also provide some resources out of which we can envision Black people in a more just relationship to the production of popular culture.

The Speculative Fiction of Blackness

My orientation toward genre as an organizing principle within culture holds that the identity of speculative fiction is ultimately in its readers' hands. As Toni Morrison has written, "definitions belong to the definers, not the defined." Insofar as a working description of the genre, based on its contents, takes shape in the course of reading and rereading texts, it is important to be attentive to interpretations that upset conventional expectations as well as those that appear straightforward or natural. "Reading against the grain," as the practice is typically known, is one way to place the question of what defines a set of texts into a different set of hands. It is equally important, I would argue, to consider changing the set of texts that we invoke when we posit examples of what composes speculative fiction. We would assemble a radically unconventional portrait of speculative fiction indeed if we were to highlight works by Black authors and artists that do not, at first glance, fulfill the expectations of the average SF reader. The work of defining what the genre is like and what it can do in its capacity to mediate different social contexts requires that we assess it using a wide variety of examples. We may complicate its presumptive association with Whiteness by forwarding examples in which Blackness is not an alienated, exceptional quality but something integral. I would argue that mobilizing renditions of Blackness in literature and culture that displace the Whiteness of science fiction thoroughly enough to call the identity of the genre into question—not to dissolve it, but to reconstruct it—entails reconsidering what we mean by "Blackness." What texts would we invoke, to that effect, to describe the speculative fiction of Blackness?

I am employing a chiasmic formulation that juxtaposes the Whiteness of science fiction with the speculative fiction of Blackness to invoke the ways in which we can frame the meaning of Blackness in speculative fiction and media through a rhetorical structure characteristic of Black speech. It has the efficacy of pleasurable sonic resonances, as well. Just as I do not define speculative fiction for the purposes of this project, I occasionally utilize the term *science fiction* in its place, usually according to the sound of the words; sometimes *science fiction*, *fantasy*, and *utopia*

take on distinct meanings in the context of particular chapters. In the aforementioned phrase, they are synonyms.

To situate Blackness in a constructive and even constitutive relationship with knowledge formations germane to speculative fiction, instead of presuming or attempting to prove its alienation, we might begin by reminding ourselves that cultural production is relatively autonomous from the social structure in which it exists. Therefore cultural works do not necessarily appear in the same relationship to members of a given population of authors or audiences but rather the relationship between texts and people's lives is contingent on the conditions under which the production and dissemination of texts take place. In light of this consideration, it is important to note that some of the works I discuss to lend credence to a notion of the speculative fiction of Blackness are not responses to conventional speculative fiction at all. As I demonstrate in what follows, when the bodies of knowledge brought to bear on framing the meaning of Blackness are invested in prioritizing its survival in the face of racism (rather than those that deliberately or unwittingly maintain problematic race thinking), they can converge with speculative fiction—or any genre tradition—in transformative and, indeed, reparative ways.

The remainder of this introduction characterizes the speculative fiction of Blackness as my own rubric for an emergent theme in Black cultural criticism by way of some touchstones in recent scholarship. Along with literary fiction, many of these studies regard other forms of knowledge production, in print as well as music, performance, and visual culture, and I argue that this capacity to work across media is a valuable contribution that Black cultural criticism makes to SF studies. I conclude by explaining how perspectives on the speculative fiction of Blackness account for the sources and methods I have employed in my own research. It is my goal in this book to portray both the Whiteness of science fiction and the speculative fiction of Blackness, respectively, as theoretical points of departure each valuable in their own right. These positions, as I am representing them presently, do not exhaust the terms in which we can talk about race thinking in literature and culture, and though my interpretations throughout the book are attentive to the questions that arise out of this formulation, they are not confined to them.

I am naming four specific examples of the speculative fiction of Blackness: Afrofuturism, surrealism, Otherhood, and haunting. Each of these concepts reconsiders how genre conventions and the distinctions between them have played a role in the struggle over interpretations of what it

means to be Black. Each of the studies I cite relies extensively on the work of Black authors as evidence about the stakes of that struggle. Sometimes the cultural practices that the speculative fiction of Blackness evokes confound the conventional wisdom about race and genre, either because they involve subjects who are arguably “not Black” or texts that are arguably “not science fiction.” On this point, I concede that because speculative fiction is an umbrella term, it is not congruent with its constituent parts: fantasy, horror, utopia and dystopia, paranormal romance, counterfactual history, magical realism, and so on. In the scholarship I am discussing and in my own research, these terms are applicable strategically, if not always precisely.¹⁷

In venues across disciplines, the term *Afrofuturism* has charted a new constellation among artistic endeavors undertaken by people of African descent. The portmanteau *Afrofuturism* originated with White cultural commentator and art critic Mark Dery in an article he wrote to introduce his interviews with Black cultural critics Greg Tate and Tricia Rose and writer Samuel Delany. The title of Dery’s essay, “Black to the Future,” has some resonance with that of the article by Thulani Davis, “The Future May Be Bleak, but It’s Not Black,” which was a touchstone for Kilgore’s dilemma.¹⁸

Dery communicates the meaning of Afrofuturism in reparative as well as deconstructive terms. He addresses its constitutive contradictions head-on:

African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called “Afrofuturism.” The notion . . . gives rise to a troubling antinomy: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?¹⁹

Dery frames the notion that African American expressive culture appears preoccupied with the past, rather than the future, as a casualty of racial oppression. When he invokes the discursive eradication of the African American past as a potential obstacle to the emergence of Afrofuturism, he is rehearsing the narrative that gave us the term *futurism* in the first place. The original futurists hoped to literally destroy all vestiges of their classical civilization to extend the purported virtues of the industrial age into all areas of knowledge. Their hyperbolic rhetoric in support of genocidal war was among the evidence that the cultural Left in Europe used

to denounce fascism, and futurists made Marxist critics more vigilant than ever about the power of propaganda.²⁰

The catalog of inchoate Afrofuturist thought that Dery proposes comprises an alternative to European futurism from the African diaspora: "Glimpses of it can be caught in Jean-Michel Basquiat paintings . . . movies such as John Sayles's *The Brother from Another Planet* . . . Jimi Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* . . . and the intergalactic big-band jazz churned out by Sun Ra's Omniverse Arkestra."²¹ The connections between these works and contemporary artists like the Wondaland Arts Society and the many participants in the groundbreaking *Shadows Took Shape* exhibition at New York's Studio Museum in Harlem attest to the broad appeal of Afrofuturist aesthetics. Identifying the speculative fiction of Blackness in this fashion brings popular media in which people of African descent have attained celebrity into dialogue with the relatively few examples of Black fiction writers achieving professional success in the paraliterary genre of science fiction. This way of positioning science fiction authors as constituents of a Black expressive tradition, rather than viewing them as isolated minorities within a predominantly White community of writers, performs reparation vis-à-vis the alienating effects of the putative Whiteness of science fiction.

If it is appropriate for futurism to lend its name to areas of Black cultural production in an uncanny, hypothetical sense, then surrealism is an even more salient example of the speculative fiction of Blackness, because people of African descent were deeply involved in its development. According to Black social historian Robin D. G. Kelley, surrealism should be conceptualized in terms of political consciousness. He characterizes it as "an international revolutionary movement concerned with the emancipation of thought."²² With its positive injunction to liberate the unconscious and, by extension, to eliminate all forms of repression, surrealism challenged the distinction between the ideational and the material. According to Kelley's reading, it was a rebellion against Western civilization itself, not simply its artistic traditions.²³

Kelley emphasizes the Black intellectual foundations of the surrealist agenda. The movement evolved in tandem with anti-imperialist interventions in culture, such as Négritude, and for Kelley's purposes, certain characteristics of each philosophy are transposable onto the other. For instance, Kelley recounts how Aimé Césaire, one of the leaders among the generation of francophone African diaspora intellectuals who coined the word *Négritude*, played an integral role in the development of surrealist thought.²⁴

Kelley traces the affinity between Black liberation and surrealism to the work of Suzanne Césaire, as well. Her comments include citations of André Breton's influence, and she provides a unique rendition of the value of this school of thought in language that anticipates Afrofuturism:

Our surrealism will then supply them the leaven from their very depths. It will be time finally to transcend the sordid antinomies: Whites–Blacks, Europeans–Africans, civilized–savage: the powerful magic of the mahoulis will be recovered, drawn from the very wellsprings of life. Colonial idiocies will be purified by the welding arc's blue flame.²⁵

Performing surrealism as a movement grounded in Martinique as much as in Europe, relying on quixotic metaphors like camouflage, and maintaining a commitment to the transformative power of poetry, Suzanne Césaire sought to undo the definitions of Blackness, space, and the human devised by colonialism. In keeping with the suspension of disbelief encouraged by the surrealism of the Césaires, Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* also situates demands for reparations in the aftermath of slavery and the antinomianism of Black feminist politics in the context of Black intellectuals' audacious efforts to expand the range of what is considered possible in the modern world.

Afrofuturism and surrealism draw our attention to aspects of African American culture that would otherwise go overlooked. However, the evidence for the speculative fiction of Blackness that I am drawing on is also available within genre fiction. Isiah Lavender's book *Race in American Science Fiction* focuses on works that conform to the average reader's expectations regarding the print form of SF texts and the literary devices highlighted by most SF critics, but he contextualizes these texts in a way that renders African Americanist perspectives integral rather than peripheral to their meaning. The term *Otherhood* is one of several tools Lavender forges to examine racial discourse in speculative fiction. *Race in American Science Fiction* succeeds at the difficult work of linking science fiction texts that address racial identity in explicit terms, on one hand, to those that invoke race thinking allegorically, on the other. Otherhood names both the state of being Other in relation to a dominant culture and the sense of "place" (or neighborhood, as the term suggests) marked out for that state of being. This maneuver makes Lavender one of the few SF critics to address the explicit references to Jim Crow segregation in the work of authors like Ray Bradbury and Robert Heinlein, for instance. Only by recognizing a long history of engagements with themes that are grounded

in the social situations that characterize Blackness, Lavender argues, can we situate the prominence of race thinking in the work of Black writers like Nalo Hopkinson, Charles Saunders, and Steven Barnes as an extension of the SF tradition, rather than an exception.

Among the fantastic genres, the horror tradition has a prominent place in popular media, including print fiction, television, and cinema. This popularity, coupled to a lack of cultural prestige that is ostensibly typical for speculative fiction, makes renditions of Blackness through the lens of fright particularly compelling. The last chapter of this book deals with Blackness in fantasy texts with horror overtones. As I argue regarding other subgenres in addition to horror, Black authors can make exemplary interventions in speculative fiction by situating conventional subject matter in alternative frames of reference. To that effect, I would echo the observations of other critics regarding Tananarive Due as a Black writer who has achieved rare distinction in the horror tradition. In another vein, I recommend the paranormal romance novels by the late L. A. Banks as a significant example of the Black public's interest in paraliterary works responsive to their desires. Beyond the thematic and market shifts engendered by these writings, tropes at the intersection of fear and racialized social consciousness have theoretical significance, because they often demonstrate how the meanings of Blackness are embedded in narratives about death—and what happens afterward.

There is a notable tradition of Black intellectual work that reanimates the relationship between Blackness and death, from Alice Walker's reverent work to literally uncover the grave of Zora Neale Hurston to Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death*. Sharon Holland's *Raising the Dead* is one work that likens engagement with minoritarian discourse to crossing the threshold between life and the marginal space of death; Avery Gordon's groundbreaking *Ghostly Matters* is another. Drawing on critical race theory, Gordon invokes haunting, a concept peculiar to speculative fiction of the supernatural bent, to describe modes of race thinking and emotional responses to racism that manifest in literature, media, and everyday life:

Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment . . . when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and riggings are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.²⁶

To the extent that violence and loss have characterized minority subjectivity, Gordon asserts, the lingering residue of those social facts calls for something to be done in the present and future. Haunting will not go away so long as its conditions of possibility remain intact. The persistence of haunting in culture provides the impetus for research into some of the dilemmas that characterize Blackness, such as trauma, premature death, and diminished life chances. A quintessential Black American novel, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, is a touchstone for African Americanist scholarship in this vein.

Treatments of haunting and similar phenomena arise throughout literature, cinema, visual culture, music, and performance, making them especially generative for engagements with the speculative fiction of Blackness across media. In film, Kasi Lemmons's magic-inflected *Eve's Bayou* and Julie Dash's nonlinear *Daughters of the Dust* have drawn scholars' attention to the place of clandestine knowledge formations structured by space, gender, and age in Black diasporic communities. Appraising *Eve's Bayou* and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, critic Kara Keeling addresses the specter of the Black femme as a figure who exists outside the limitations of the hegemonic mind, where her survival defies common sense. While she references the poststructuralism of Gilles Deleuze, Keeling's work is also strongly informed by the feminist theory of Audre Lorde.²⁷ Julie Dash has made her recourse to speculative fiction explicit, invoking the term's expansive meaning to describe the ways in which her work envisions formative situations in Black culture that are obscured by a realist frame of reference.²⁸ Haunted states and spaces of negation characterize these works, but the power of knowledge that is irreconcilable with everyday life also lends itself to tropes like ancestry, pregnancy, destiny, and prophecy, linking some of these speculative fictions of Blackness with mythology and utopia. They share a common reliance on the evidence of things not seen.²⁹ These practices identify Blackness with a broader than normal scope of possibilities rather than a truncated range of meanings.

In view of these perspectives, I hope to offer the reader several leads to pursue throughout the book and connections to make between this book and others. Axiomatically, the overrepresentation of Whiteness and the comparatively limited involvement of Black people in producing speculative fiction both have a significant impact on what it means for Black people to locate ourselves in the ranks of the genre's authors and its audiences. According to reflections by writers, readers, fans, and critics, the dissonance that accrues to being Black and inhabiting the cultural space

marked out by speculative fiction is a meaningful situation, but it is not an insurmountable obstacle to participating in the genre in some typical and some atypical ways. Because this participation takes place, it creates evidence from which we can learn lessons about Blackness and speculative fiction that would not be possible otherwise. Depictions of Blackness within speculative fiction, across the media in which they occur and across the backgrounds of the persons who author them, are all the more telling when considered in the context of a field of cultural production structured by race as well as genre. Understanding popular culture in these terms is instrumental to the rapprochement between critical approaches to Blackness and speculative fiction that this book pursues. Like the aforementioned scholars, I proceed from the recognition that African American culture encompasses characterizations of Blackness that are profoundly resonant with practices of futurity, speculation, alternative understandings of space and time, and the supernatural.

Overview

The speculative fiction of Blackness and the Whiteness of science fiction are analytical abstractions that I have distilled from a complex, multifaceted body of evidence. The chiasmic formulation I have offered here does not provide an exhaustive description of the relationship between race and genre, of course, but it establishes a point of departure from which every investigation of a specific text within this work might appear as a star in the constellation charted by the work as a whole. By problematizing certain patterns that prevail across the body of evidence from which I have drawn examples, I am suggesting that we revise our notion of what speculative fiction is about and our notions of what Blackness is like to develop a more sophisticated understanding of race thinking and cultural production than adherence to these patterns permits.

The structure of the book reflects my concern with illustrating patterns that characterize Blackness in speculative fiction and media and complicating them, as well. In chapter 1, I explore how members of science fiction fan communities at formative moments in the history of the genre experimented with identities structured by race, ethnicity, gender, and professional status through the tools of amateur publishing. This chapter relies on fanzines and evidence from gatherings of fans beginning in the 1920s, with a particular focus on the 1950s. The second and third chapters examine how portrayals of Black womanhood in some

utopian narratives, namely, television's *Star Trek* and the *X-Men* comic books, recapitulated certain myths about Blackness, gender, nationalism, and internationalism, while undercutting others. These chapters interpret how images of Black women, the actor Nichelle Nichols and the fictitious comic book character Storm, became central to the contending currents of cultural politics in the Cold War era. Both chapters stage confrontations between modes of reading speculative fiction based on allegory and analogy and approaches to interpretation shaped by feminist speculative fiction and Black feminist critique.

Shifting focus to productions by Black authors while holding up a mirror to the preceding chapters, chapters 4 and 5 discuss how prototypical SF narratives, the story of a superhero and the story of a science fiction writer, respectively, confront their readers with unlikely considerations when they are situated in Black settings, that is, settings characterized by the social circumstances in which people of African descent live. Chapter 4 continues discussing comics with a treatment of Milestone Media's superhero series *Icon*, published in the 1990s, and chapter 5 returns to the *Star Trek* franchise in its later iteration, *Deep Space Nine*. I emphasize the ways in which the works discussed in these chapters apply interpretive strategies germane to Black American writing to the "internal discourse" of speculative fiction and superhero comics—that is, the story the genre tells itself about itself. Like chapter 1, the sixth and final chapter reconsiders the role of reception and fandom as integral features of the SF genre tradition by examining how contemporary fan fiction online reconfigures the relationship between race, nation, and genre conventions in two popular fantasy series: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Harry Potter series. Taken together, these topics and the critical resources I utilize to explore them represent a cross section of interests in contemporary literary and cultural studies.

1

JOSH BRANDON'S BLUES

Inventing the Black Fan

FROM DECEMBER 11, 1929, UNTIL SPRING 1930, James Fitzgerald of Harlem served as the president of New York's first science fiction club. They were called the Scienceers. They may have been the first group in the United States devoted to the discussion of science fiction; they are certainly among the earliest documented.¹ According to one of the Scienceers' founding members, Allen Glasser, Mr. Fitzgerald was a light-skinned Negro, about thirty years of age. His wife, whom Glasser describes as "darker-hued," hosted the boys at the couple's home. In 1930, Fitzgerald moved on to join the American Rocket Society, a group of professionals interested in developing a space program for the United States. Glasser and his young colleagues found a new meeting place at the home of Mortimer Weisinger in the Bronx.²

Why would a man like James Fitzgerald start a group like the Scienceers? This question is equally pertinent to the history of science fiction fans in the United States and the history of Black American cultural movements. For at the same time that Fitzgerald took an interest in the burgeoning genre of popular fantastic literature, a Black middle class emerged onto the broader landscape of American culture with the Harlem Renaissance. The Great Depression would slow both these movements to a standstill, as the costs associated with amateur publishing stunted the growth of science fiction fandom and the Black middle class was among the first to fall into crushing poverty. But somehow, in the midst of those catastrophic events, the seed of a new movement had taken root with a Black intellectual to tend it. James Fitzgerald and his wife are the uncanny progenitors of this chapter's subject, the next Black American who would attain a high profile through his association with science fiction: Carl Joshua Brandon.

James Fitzgerald was an off-color example of Alain Locke's New Negro, a middle-class Black man of thirty, eager to share his family life and domestic space with cultured youth, openly involved in a romance without regard for the intraracial color line, and equally eager to share his cultural interests across that line interracially. If Fitzgerald's enthusiasm for scientific fiction (as it was called in the first magazines devoted to the genre) set him apart from his Black colleagues to make him the sole representative of the New Negro in fandom, then Carl Brandon was the next Negro, following in his footsteps. As of the early 1950s, there hadn't been a Black participant of any stature in fandom since Fitzgerald. He had been the only Black attendee at the Philadelphia meeting billed as the first science fiction convention, and he would be the only one at the first national science fiction convention in 1938 in New York.³ Limited though it was, though, thanks to Fitzgerald, fans had a frame of reference for the participation of Black people in the genre within the history of science fiction, long before Carl Brandon emerged. Just as Fitzgerald's leadership was emblematic of the ways fans would promote interest in science and science fiction throughout American culture, Carl Brandon's role was central to the irreverent turnaround they would perform in the 1950s, when many fans abandoned their "serious, constructive" engagement with the genre to define themselves as independently thinking hobbyists.⁴ The ersatz innovator who arrived in the house Fitzgerald built twenty-five years later would leave bigger shoes to fill than any Black fan before or since.

James Fitzgerald set a precedent for Carl Brandon in the same way that he set a precedent for all fans. He was the Black progenitor and exemplar of a cultural formation that was henceforth identified with Whiteness. Fitzgerald parlayed his interest in the genre into an interest in science, and in so doing he helped contribute to the tradition of fans becoming professionals. His failure, or more likely, his desire, not to affiliate with one racialized literary movement taking place in his immediate vicinity, while taking up a leadership role in another, makes Fitzgerald's function as a figure for the connection between Black American literature and science fiction tenuous at best. In short, his Blackness is suspect. Similarly, Carl Brandon's legacy provides something more than a racialized appendix to common understandings of the way science fiction fans interpret their genre of preference, because his Blackness is also historically and culturally suspect, tenuously identified with the criteria of racial identification in his day. Rather than providing a racialized critique of science fiction on behalf of Black readers everywhere, Carl Brandon provides a

telling example of how crucial it is to the participatory quality of the genre that critiques of race thinking take root among its fans.

The subject of this chapter, Carl Joshua Brandon, bequeathed fans an innovative approach to speculative fiction and the concept of genre itself with his contributions to fanzines in the 1950s. In the example of Brandon, fans and scholars of popular culture can observe how, after the so-called golden age of science fiction, writing in fanzines would increasingly take place in dialogue with divergent cultural movements, just as the impetus Fitzgerald had provided for science fiction fandom represented a divergence from the cultural interests of other Black Americans in his day. In this chapter, rather than chastising fans for their inattention to the ways their favored genre dealt with race and racism, I explore the ways in which Brandon's peculiarity illuminates the centrality of Whiteness to fandom. At the same time, he demonstrates the role of fans as interlocutors between genres. I argue that by installing Carl as the author of a strategy they would call "Brandonization," Brandon's cohort brought to light the ways in which fandom had become a genre formation unto itself: a genre formation preoccupied with its own textuality. By highlighting the textuality of fandom through his specialization in the *intertextuality* of amateur publications, Brandon's work highlights the dependence of all genres on their readers' ability to comprehend and make distinctions among writing in multiple genres. Science fiction influenced Brandon's generation as one force among many in the development of fan fiction. I argue, therefore, that Carl Brandon's versatility in the techniques of his medium used genre itself as the means to uncouple fandom from its constrained relationship with professionally published science fiction.

I will proceed in this chapter to chronicle Carl Brandon's rise and fall as a star writer and to examine some of the works that earned him his reputation. Carl specialized in a brand of fan fiction that poked fun at the work of popular writers, including his fellow fans, by depicting the latter as characters in his own versions of existing narratives. Among these were his first and only treatment of a science fiction novel, Poul Anderson's *Brain Wave*, and many more parodies that took celebrated works, including *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and emergent Beat literature, as their canon. Brandon's work circulated in fanzines published by amateur writers and editors, and I will detail how the culture of amateur publishing in which he took part typified the technological and organizational features of a bygone era that historians of popular culture could stand to reconsider. In the current moment, as other sections of this study

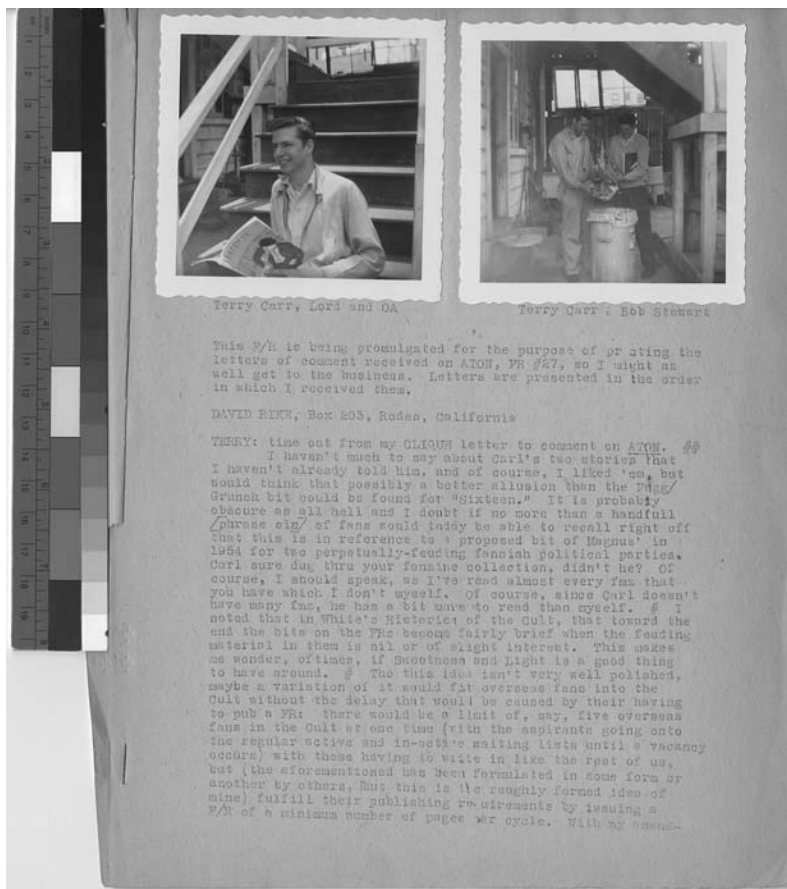
demonstrate, new media are changing the relationship between technology, desire, and identification; however, the focus on textuality in my research on Brandon questions the stakes of representing Blackness in *old* media. Carl's Blackness contributed mightily to his success in fandom because it was an artifact of talented practices for writing and reproducing texts: unlike James Fitzgerald, Carl Brandon never really existed.

In the present discussion, I will explain how writings in the name of Carl Brandon could mount an effective response to the meanings of Whiteness and genre that characterized 1950s fandom through the strategic perpetration of a hoax. I hope to draw this discussion to a close with some suggestions for interpreting the way that Brandon's Blackness, like Fitzgerald's before, might be called into question on the basis of genre. The legacy of Carl Brandon suggests that literary and paraliterary practices provide an untapped reservoir for insights into how the meanings of Blackness and Whiteness take shape in the popular imagination.

The Whiteness of the Knack

"Carl Brandon" was a pen name used primarily by the White Bay Area fan writer Terry Carr. Brandon's name first appeared in print in an amateur fanzine, *Bool*, published by science fiction fan Bob Stewart.⁵ To understand what Carr had set in motion when he wrote the first stroke of a signature that would become infamous, we must understand the state of science fiction, organized fandom, and the publication of fanzines in the 1950s.

Critics of science fiction have credited fans with sustaining the genre at times when its appeal has waned among the wider public—keeping cult works alive, for instance. One such moment, following the end of the so-called golden age, during which science fiction had become increasingly prevalent in film and publishing, began a contentious era for the younger generation of fans. The precedent for Carl Brandon's emergence at that time was a shift within fan communities away from activities concerned with the themes and contents of stories in the science fiction magazines, such as *Astounding*, *The Magazine of Fantasy*, and *Galaxy*. At the time, these magazines were even changing their names to downplay the terms *fantasy* and *science fiction*. Instead, the period saw a renewed focus among fans on the expanding array of activities associated with the amateur circuit of cultural production they had created for themselves. *The Comet*, first published in 1930, inaugurated the medium of fanzines. Its



Photographs of a young Terry Carr, left, and Terry Carr with Bob Stewart, which were glued into the pages of Carr's fanzine *Atonic Aftermath*. From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

circulation was possible because the editors of the first science fiction magazines in the United States had started printing columns for fan correspondence—including the letter-writers' addresses. Fans seized this opportunity to communicate with one another directly, and they began to disseminate creative writing and commentary of their own. During World War II, paper shortages in the United States and Britain contributed to the decline of amateur publishing. After the war, however, a new generation of writers took hold of widely available printing technologies to revitalize the medium in their own image.⁶

The best example of the tone and subject matter that would prevail in fan writing of this era was *The Enchanted Duplicator* by Ireland's Walt Willis. When it was published in 1954, *Enchanted Duplicator* became a sacred text for fans whose tastes mixed humor and fantasy. Willis ushered in a trend toward parody by reproducing the allegorical story of *Pilgrim's Progress* in the setting of science fiction fan culture, complete with citations of its specialized colloquial language and mocking references to his fellow amateur authors. In the story, Willis's everyman departs from the mundane world on a quest into the magical world of amateur publishing. The protagonist's name, Jophan (Joe fan), initiates a pattern of whimsical spellings for terms in common usage among fans, including "Umor" for "humor," "Egg o' Bu" for "egoboo" (or "ego boost"), and "Magrevoos" for "magazine reviews."⁷ In one episode, Jophan's "Shield of Umor" enables him to recognize that the land in which he tarries along the way is not true fandom; humor is instrumental to navigating the fannish world. He discovers that fans have built up a false image of themselves to impress "the Public," a phrase Willis uses to refer to the mundane world of people who do not read science fiction and fanzines. A representative of "the Public" named "Mr. Press" appears, setting the stage for a confrontation between science fiction fans and the mainstream news media. Jophan's observations convey how fans deal with anxieties about being taken seriously:

Jophan noticed, however, that [Mr. Press] was writing very little of all this down in his notebook, and as Dedwood drew to the close of his impressive oration he sidled behind Mr Press and looked over his shoulder. The page was perfectly blank except for one cryptic sentence which Jophan could not understand. He knew only that it bore no relationship whatever to what Dedwood had been saying. It read, simply, "Gosh-wow-oh-boy-oh-boy."⁸

The dismissive phrase that Mr. Press uses to summarize what he has heard about fandom indicates that science fiction fans knew the wider public perceived them as juvenile and dilettantish. Rather than taking themselves too seriously, like the foil Dedwood in the preceding passage, however, Willis models a lighthearted attitude toward this situation, poking fun at his more anxious peers. Since at least the 1940s, fans had labored under the pall of infantilizing clichés; in the real-life event the passage reiterates, a reporter for *Time* described the sentiment of attendees at the first World Science Fiction Convention in 1939 by paraphrasing a fan letter from *Thrilling Wonder Stories* magazine: "Gosh! Wow! Boyoh-boy! and so forth and so on. Yesiree, yesiree, it's the greatest in the land and the best

that's on the stand," the article read.⁹ Willis's rendition of this encounter shows that fifteen years later, fans still felt the sting of ostracism from the broader media, but they made light of it, revalorizing the attitudes of fans who demonstrated youthful whimsy and deflating the egos of fans who professed pseudo-intellectual sophistication.

Willis's adventure narrative also pays homage to the Swiftian mode of allegory and the exoticism of Rudyard Kipling. These forefathers of the fantastic genres provide the worldly logic through which Jophan's encounters unfold by offering a model for the way he maps out social ideals and positions within social hierarchies through portrayals of distant lands and their inhabitants. In chapter 13 of his story, titled "In Which Jophan Recruits Native Bearers," he meets fanzine subscribers who are known as the "Subrs." The Subrs, who do not speak but merely grunt, are a company of "tribesmen" whose loyalty sustains Jophan's efforts to publish the perfect fanzine.¹⁰ Typically, fanzine writers bartered for one another's publications, trading their own zines for those of interested correspondents. Another way to ensure that one received issues of a fanzine was to write a letter for its letters column reviewing the previous issue's contents. Subscribing to fanzines for a fee, however, enabled readers to stay abreast of commentary without taking a vocal role in their content. The portrayal of the Subrs as "native bearers" instills a resonance between the work of publishing fanzines, on one hand, and the work of colonial exploration that fans might find evident in travel writing, on the other. Time would tell if Carl Brandon would echo these conventions or inaugurate a different relationship to Whiteness in his contributions to the medium.

Brandon's place of birth was Bob Stewart's fanzine, titled *Boo!* Stewart shared his publication with only a dozen people, through the mail, and it contained a mix of humorous short stories, artwork, and commentary, much of which included science fiction themes. Like most fanzines, it published letters from readers, but Stewart had so few interlocutors that in 1953, he decided to solicit a letter of comment from his friend Terry Carr under a false name to make it appear that there were more people interested in *Boo!* Predictably, given the circumstances, the first statement signed by Carl Joshua Brandon was favorable: his letter indicated that he had enjoyed *Boo!* #1.¹¹ In a later publication, once the name of Carl Brandon was established in the minds of a few readers, Terry Carr would revive the byline for a short story he had actually written himself. The story, "Brain Ripple," was a parody of the novel *Brain Wave*, by Poul Anderson. It was Brandon's first "original" work.

Published in 1954 and considered one of Anderson's finest works by critics, *Brain Wave* portrays a sudden increase in the intelligence of all animals on Earth, including people, and the human race's subsequent experimentation in space travel, science, and social organization. Several intriguing features contribute to the innovative form of *Brain Wave*, and Carl Brandon would include them in his parody. There was an opening scene from the point of view of a rabbit escaping from a hunter's trap, a set of headlines from the *New York Times* about problems with government and science that illuminate the novel's setting, and alterations in the typography and grammar of dialogue to indicate that characters with increased intelligence were communicating nonverbally. Nonverbal dialogue was enclosed in parentheses, whereas verbal conversation remained within quotation marks.¹² Just as Willis adapted *Pilgrim's Progress* for his *Enchanted Duplicator*, Terry Carr would reverse-engineer the style of *Brain Wave* to hilarious effect in "Brain Ripple," associating Brandon's name with this compelling strategy. The story appeared in a fanzine published by David Rike, a San Francisco-based friend of Carr who would become an active participant in the hoax about Brandon throughout its duration.

"Brain Ripple" showcases the techniques that established Carl Brandon's literary personality by recapitulating Anderson's style and plot but recasting the story's setting and content based on insider knowledge of science fiction fandom. Where Anderson shows a rabbit with enhanced intelligence escaping from a cage in the beginning of his novel, Brandon begins his story with the noted science fiction author Harlan Ellison evading a tedious conversation about a fanzine—apparently, this situation constituted a trap for a professional writer. Where *Brain Wave* employs the masthead of the *New York Times* to portray news events, "Brain Ripple" refers to *Fantasy Times*, a fanzine that was a popular source of news about science fiction magazines and novels.¹³ One of the central jokes in the short story reproduces a scene from *Brain Wave* in which the characters have temporarily lost their superhuman intelligence. Brandon pokes fun at Anderson and at the haughty attitudes of his fellow fans by recasting the scene as a fannish innuendo. He relies on a telling reference to another science fiction novel familiar to readers of his day to make the joke:

They had lost their new-found intelligence. They were . . . normal again . . .

A month later they found a copy of BEM [a fanzine] skipping down the street in the wind. Willis made a dash for it and snatched it up. He looked at it in wonder. . . . They all smiled, and as the realization set in, the smiles grew

wider. They were back under the influence of fandom. They had their slan-powers back.¹⁴

Later in the story, the same loss befalls a major character's wife, just as it does toward the end of *Brain Wave*. In Brandon's story, instead of temporarily losing their ability to fly spacecraft and perform complicated mathematics (the signs of enhanced intelligence in *Brain Wave*), the characters lose their ability to write irreverent fanzines. Brandon's version of the story substitutes fandom for hyperintelligence. He compounds this theme by portraying intelligence through a typical fannish trope at the time: an allusion to the novel *Slan*.

Slan was a widely read work by Alfred Elton van Vogt adapted from a series of his short stories in the 1940s. The eponymous "slan" is a small group of very intelligent superhumans who are persecuted by the majority of humankind. One writer who published fanzines in the same period as Carl Brandon, rich brown, writes, "Fans identified easily enough with slans as a persecuted minority because of the reactions they frequently got from mundane society merely for reading that Crazy Buck Rogers Stuff—but not to the extent that they believed fans were superior beings."¹⁵ Referring to *Slan*, an allegory for racial oppression and racial superiority, became a means for the novel's readers to express a combined sense of misunderstanding and entitlement. Carl Brandon's fluency in the specialized language of fandom, to the point where he used its treasured insider knowledge to criticize his peers, became instrumental to his efforts to make a name for himself (or Terry Carr's effort to make a name for him). Brandon's ability to synthesize his fellow fans' assiduous attention to how science fiction was written and published with their jocular attitude toward the genre, and occasionally toward one another, earned him high regard from his peers.

As his propensity toward *Slan* references indicates, one of the ways that Terry Carr and his collaborators made Brandon's personality believable to readers was by endowing the fake fan with prejudices they all shared. The last line in "Brain Ripple," in which slanlike characters decide the fate of the aforementioned character's wife once she has lost her knack for writing fanzines, belies the notion that fans wouldn't lord their "slan-powers" over the general public. Brandon writes,

(What can we do about Madeleine? She's not happy.)

James shrugged. (There's only one thing.)

Willis nodded. (Yes. The *Reservation*.)

The next day Madeleine joined the NFFF.¹⁶

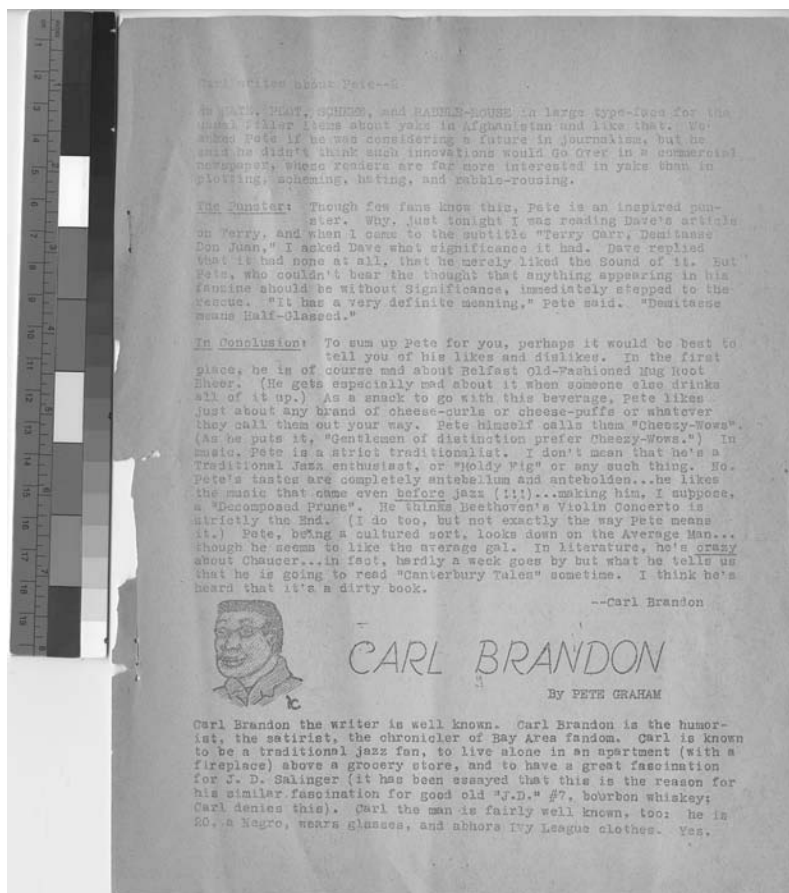
In this passage, Brandon alludes to the National Fantasy Fan Federation, a group that fans like Terry Carr held in contempt in the early 1950s. The allusion would be meaningful to readers for two reasons. First, by referring to the NFFF as “the Reservation,” evoking the connotations of backwardness and isolation that characterize popular portrayals of American Indian reservations, the story reiterates rhetoric from *Brain Wave* that relies on a common understanding of racial identity, intelligence, and disability. To illustrate the notion that all animals’ intelligence might suddenly, noticeably improve, Anderson’s novel incorporates the racist presumption that less intelligent races of human beings demonstrate capabilities that are comparable to those of animals. From this racist point of view, under normal circumstances, a smart animal would appear similar in intelligence to a member of an inferior racial group among humans. After the enhancement of *Brain Wave* takes place, the novel contrives situations in which brainy beasts perform feats of intelligence that the author compares directly to those of heretofore disabled and racially marginal humans. Accordingly, the hero of *Brain Wave* is a mentally disabled farmworker who uses his sudden competence to lead a troupe of livestock and circus animals to liberation, after his now-smarter-than-average human counterparts have abandoned him. Similarly, the novel portrays people in Third World countries rebelling against colonial rule by recruiting the aid of new, improved primates who can now understand them. Anderson depicts a Black anticolonial insurgent negotiating an alliance with a dexterous, gun-toting ape: they are both, after all, still Africans.¹⁷ With slantlike precision, Carl Brandon draws on rhetoric from within the specific science fiction texts by Anderson and van Vogt that he has drawn into conversation to frame his analogy between inferior intelligence, like that of Native Americans, ostensibly, and inferior preferences in culture—the National Fantasy Fan Federation—in a racial frame of reference that his readers would understand.

The second reason that Brandon’s joke about the NFFF works in “Brain Ripple” involves a more benign way to profess individuality in fandom. A mission to unify and organize the activity of all fans reading science fiction, writing to magazines, and corresponding with one another throughout the country, while eliciting new interest in the genre from the general public, inspired the 1941 founding of the NFFF. This shared vision ran

counter to the individual and factional aims of many fans in the 1950s. The NFFF's origin was still a powerful and well-known narrative among fans, making it socially meaningful for someone to reject it. By embracing a strategy of self-representation that fans like Terry Carr thought of as a matter of independence, a strategy that the NFFF thought counterproductive, Carl Brandon gave off an air of dissidence that helped define his relationship with science fiction. At the same time, he seemed to long for a venue to express a creative impulse that would not be limited in terms of genre. Both of these criteria formed suitable pretexts for publishing fanzines in his generation, and both of them made him seem as fully developed an individual as any of his peers. Like-minded amateurs could welcome Carl as one of their own after the publication of "Brain Ripple," and at the time, they had reason to believe he was White.

Brandon would go on to join the Cult, a group of fans beyond Carr's and Stewart's circle of friends. The Cult required each member to take turns publishing a fanzine called *Fantasy Rotator* for the enjoyment of the others on a regular basis. The subject matter of an issue of *Fantasy Rotator* depended solely on the interests of whoever was writing and distributing it, and science fiction was only occasionally the main focus. The arrival of Carl Brandon into a segment of fandom that didn't devote much of its attention to science fiction in the 1950s evidences how the medium of fanzines provided a ready-made audience for anyone with opinions and access to a good mimeograph machine. Access to technology was especially important for Carl Brandon, who, despite his talent, made a limited impact when he first appeared in 1955. The first picture of Carl Brandon that appeared, alongside the publication of "Brain Ripple," in the fanzine published by Dave Rike was a line drawing by Terry Carr that showed Carl as White. That fanzine, *Califan*, was reproduced on a low-end flatbed Ditto machine. It boasted a circulation of about six people. Many more people saw a later depiction by Terry Carr, along with a biography of Carl by Peter Graham.

As opposed to the ambitious but virtually unread publication *Califan*, the fanzine in which the latter image of Carl Brandon appeared was printed on a mimeograph, and it circulated through an amateur press association (the aforementioned Cult). These instruments of textual reproduction formed the infrastructure of fandom in the 1950s; they would also establish the material basis on which Carr and his co-conspirators could identify Carl Brandon as Black. As the events chronicled in the remainder of this chapter demonstrate, the instruments of amateur publishing would



A drawing shaded in multiple colors depicting Carl Brandon, the pseudonymous Black fan writer, with a biographical sketch by Peter Graham. This drawing appeared in the fanzine *Arbogast*. From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

allow the Carl Brandon hoax to reveal and to influence race thinking in the everyday life of science fiction fans in a way that no other intervention had before. He would even repeat James Fitzgerald's example by becoming a Black man in a prominent position in an organization for science fiction fans.

In *The Immortal Storm*, his book on the history of science fiction fandom, Sam Moskowitz recognizes the significance of Fitzgerald at an early moment, on one hand, and the apparent absence of Black people in the fan

community, on the other. Moskowitz, who was an active participant in the fan community in the years before the Brandon hoax, displays some key elements of the attitudes about Black people that prevailed in fan culture:

The willingness of the other members to accede to his leadership, regardless of racial difference, has never had an opportunity for duplication, for James Fitzgerald was the first and last colored man ever actively to engage in the activities of science fiction fandom. It is an established fact that colored science fiction readers number in the thousands, but with the exception of Fitzgerald . . . they play no part in this history.¹⁸

Despite the acknowledgment that they must have existed in the reading public, and that the first leader of a fan organization was “colored,” the way in which Moskowitz shrugs off the absence of people of color in his study underscores how Whiteness was taken for granted in the community of actively engaged science fiction readers. When Terry Carr created Brandon as a fan in his own image, he signified the persona’s Whiteness in numerous ways, including his initial drawing for *Califan*, the characterization of the NFFF in “Brain Ripple,” and Brandon’s sympathy with a sense of racial superiority in *Slan*. Carl Brandon’s transition from Whiteness to Blackness complicates Moskowitz’s assertions about the “established fact that colored science fiction readers number in the thousands” by taking the form of a spectacle. If fans already thought their peers were primarily White, but still quite diverse, why did Brandon’s emergence cause such controversy? Brandon’s appearance as the subject of a conversation about the meaning of Blackness in the science fiction fan community was ultimately a way to learn what Whiteness meant, because Brandon appeared to interrupt the supposedly unproblematic Whiteness of science fiction.

The Amateurs

Carl Brandon’s entry into organized fandom was coextensive with his identification as a Negro, and it took place in the midst of a conflict involving the interaction of sexism, racism, and anti-intellectualism in the fan community. In the longest-standing organization for science fiction fans based in the United States, revelations about the respective gender and ethnic background of two White fans precipitated questions about the potential entry of a Negro into that group. These events established

the circumstances and the means for Brandon's shift from presumptively White to apparently Black.

The largest organized groups for science fiction readers utilizing the medium of fanzines in the mid-twentieth-century United States were the National Fantasy Fan Federation and the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA). The NFFF was the punch line of Brandon's last joke in "Brain Ripple." FAPA, conversely, drew an eclectic set of members, and its primary purpose was to do what small circles like Dave Rike's regional publication *Califan* and the small amateur press association called the Cult could not: distribute fanzines to a large, sophisticated readership. When Carl Brandon applied for membership in FAPA in 1956, the limit on FAPA's membership was sixty-five, and it had a lengthy waiting list. When it began in 1937 under the leadership of Donald Wollheim of New York, however, the membership of FAPA had been limited to fifty people. That was the maximum number of legible copies of any document that could be produced by the most widespread amateur publishing technology in use among fan writers at the time: the hektograph.¹⁹

The hektograph takes its name from the Greek *hekatón*, for "hundred," and *graphein*, for "writing," so-called by the makers of hekto inks for their potential to produce allegedly one hundred copies from a single original.²⁰ The method emerged in the 1870s, around the same time as the typewriter and the original stencil duplicator, the device that would become known as the mimeograph. The hektograph was a fairly simple method of document reproduction, transferring text written with special dyes on a master document onto a bed of gelatin and, subsequently, from the gelatin onto a number of copies. The original could be produced by hand or, after 1872, on a typewriter with a specialized ribbon containing the required dyes.²¹ The expansion of FAPA's membership that began in 1943 signals two developments: first, organized fandom took an obvious step away from a widely available and inexpensive, if less efficient, method of document reproduction to an increasingly—but not universally—available, more expensive, much more efficient system.²² A good mimeograph could produce hundreds of copies, and the stencils from which originals were made could be stored for later use. Although they had the technological capacity to reach hundreds of people, members of FAPA in the 1940s and 1950s preferred to maintain a degree of exclusivity rather than aspiring to the broad-based participation demonstrated by their more numerous counterparts in the NFFF.

As Carl Brandon's publishing career attests, a wide array of activities flourished outside the purview of science fiction when fans found new ways to employ technologies that had previously organized their communication about the genre. FAPA charged membership dues to offset the costs of printing official correspondence in a publication that reached members and wait-listers alike. These dues also paid for postage on the bundles of fanzines that all members received. Each quarter, every member of FAPA received a bundle with each of the fanzines other members had published that quarter and *The Fantasy Amateur*, the official organ of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, in which it printed discussions of administrative matters among members and officers. It was common for fans to be producing and distributing at least one fanzine within a small group (as Bob Stewart, Dave Rike, and Terry Carr were doing with a few of their friends) before they joined large or small amateur press associations. Many members of APAs read and produced materials regarding interests other than science fiction, and the ease of access to hektograph, spirit duplicator, and mimeograph technology had made it easy for them to communicate. When they came together in an APA, they would not only pour their enthusiasm for science fiction into the organization but also share their other interests with one another through a constantly widening range of concentric circles of correspondence.

One of the implications of the fact that it was practically very simple to distribute amateur publications with or without an organizing principle like genre was that fans brought a variety of models for engaging with one another, based on prior experiences and dispositions, into their participation in science fiction fandom. Many fanzines were distributed through organizations less formal than FAPA, like the Cult, for example, while other fanzine publishers did not enter into organizations at all. Whereas FAPA had a number of elected officers, the Cult only had one leadership position: Official Arbiter. Unwitting members of the Cult elected Carl Brandon to that position twice.²³ The distribution of Cult members' publications was decentralized, as well. Unlike FAPA's sixty-five bundled fanzines coming from one central location, one of the Cult's thirteen members would publish his or her fanzine on a semimonthly basis, and although each fanzine had an individual title, they were collectively numbered in a series called *The Fantasy Rotator*; and the administrative business of the group took place through correspondence over the course of successive publications.²⁴ Meanwhile, the publishers of a fanzine called *Coup* called themselves "the voice of Fanarchy," and they espoused the

opinion that fandom worked best without any official leadership roles or organizational hierarchy.²⁵

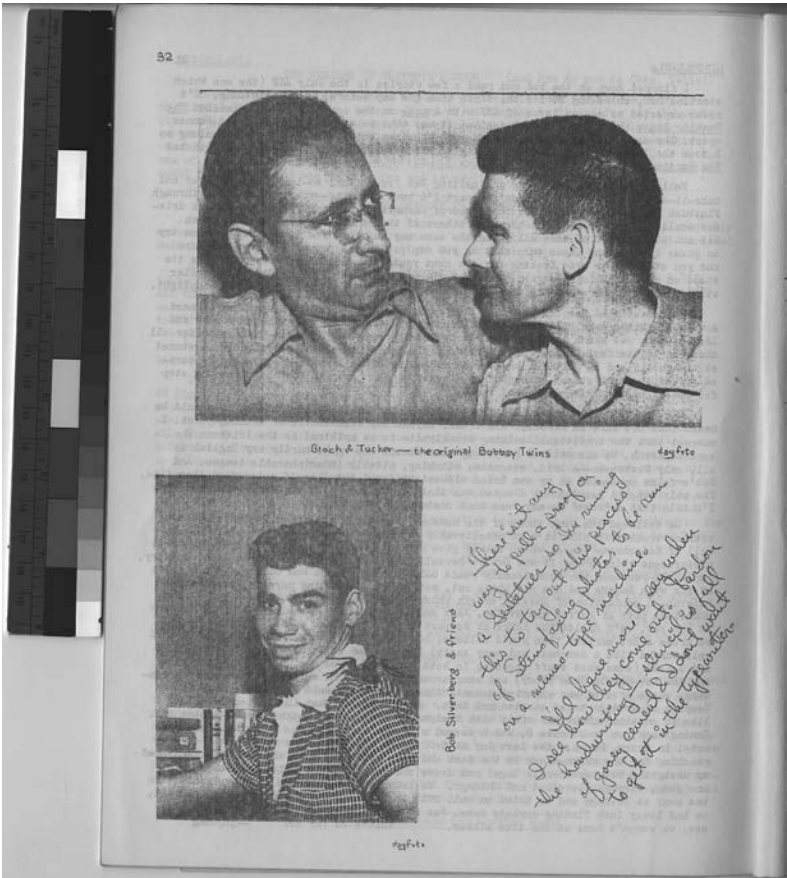
The preceding overview of where organizations like FAPA fit into the landscape of fans' reading, writing, and publishing practices helps us understand the extent to which Terry Carr was making a social and political statement to a specific community when he staged Carl Brandon's self-identification as a Negro in 1956. Since 1954, a debate over racial prejudice had been simmering among FAPA members. It started when Dean Grennell of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, obtained a Gestetner mimeograph machine for US\$237 in 1954—that amount would be more than US\$2,000 today, more than the cost of a color photocopier.²⁶ Gestetner was the foremost British producer of stencil duplicators, their machines were not commercially available in the United States, and they were the most sought after in fandom because they were credited with the superior reproduction quality of British fanzines. One of the applications of the Gestetner for Grennell's fanzine, *Grue*, was the reproduction of a photo of Robert Silverberg, one of his collaborators, who would go on to become a well-regarded science fiction writer.²⁷

Silverberg (pictured in front of a bookshelf with a tarantula on his shoulder) is Jewish. Like many fanzine writers and editors, he had written freely about his thoughts on the ongoing crusade against communism in the 1950s. His opinions were easy to summarize: Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist tirades were embarrassing for a country that valued freedom of speech and association. After Dean Grennell published a reproduction of his photo, finally putting a face to Silverberg's name, another fan brought up Silverberg's appearance in a review of *Grue*:

Bob, that picture of you in GRUE sure surprised me. I had an idea you were a big, fat old slob with heavy 4 o'clock shadowy jowls and cigarette ash in the wrinkles of your soup-spotted vest. . . . Heck, no wonder you can't appreciate McCarthy, I'll bet you wouldn't *dare* like anything the rest of the college boys don't like!²⁸

The writer, Gertrude M. Carr, was an ardent supporter of McCarthy. Although her opposition to Silverberg is a matter of politics, the target of her invective has shifted, from the connotations evoked by his name and her prejudice ("shadowy jowls . . . soup-spotted vest") to new insinuations based on his appearance (as a "college boy"). G. M. Carr uses the fact that he is a "college boy" to diminish the value of Silverberg's ideas; like much anticommunism rhetoric of the era, her outlook is also

anti-intellectual. In the course of conveying her criticism based on a prejudiced interpretation of visual observations, she also conveys a prejudice regarding his Jewish ethnicity by articulating her prior expectations. Her words make a particularly personal impact because she is criticizing a facsimile of Silverberg's real appearance: the photo reproduced by Grennell's superior mimeograph machine. Grennell and Silverberg were disappointed, not only because the criticism was politically unsympathetic, but also because it diminished their considerable effort to let their peers know what Bob looked like.



Mimeographed reproductions of photographs showing a young Bob Silverberg, lower, and Robert Bloch with Bob Tucker in issue #21 of the fanzine *Grue*. From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

In their own fanzines, writers in FAPA took G. M. Carr to task for her anti-Semitism, which led to a lengthy, introspective treatise on prejudice from a fan named Vernon L. McCain.²⁹ After one reader pointed to McCain's comments to encourage fans to examine their own prejudices in addition to admonishing G. M. Carr for hers, yet another writer, Sam Martinez, brought up the state of the Negro question in science fiction fandom. To the best of anyone's knowledge, there were no Black members of FAPA, so their discussions about the nature of race prejudice were essentially hypothetical, in his opinion. Martinez wrote, in May 1956,

Right now, I wonder what kind of a squawk would be raised if a negro quite openly and unabashedly applied for FAPA membership? I'll bet the South would really rise! . . . Is there a single member of the organization who can honestly say they would greet him with open arms (figuratively speaking, of course) and completely without prejudice? What is the reason for this? The old argument of non-mixing the races, and keeping the hereditary strain pure, hardly would apply to fanzines. One doesn't have to have intercourse with another Fapan to enjoy their publishing efforts, though with some of the fem-fans in the organization, it might be fun trying.³⁰

These discussions took place in the pages of several fanzines distributed by FAPA, so all sixty-five FAPA members read them. Terry Carr decided to weigh in on Martinez's provocation with a letter to the editors of *The Fantasy Amateur*, meaning that his statements would reach all of FAPA's members—as well as a broader audience, including everyone who was on the waiting list for membership in the organization. FAPA members received all fanzines distributed by the association, but dozens more received only *The Fantasy Amateur*, the publication chronicling the organization's business, while they were on the waiting list. Terry Carr took advantage of the fact that Carl Brandon's name was on the waiting list to test Martinez's proposition, with the hope of showing that fans would embrace racial tolerance, by calling their bluff: he presented Carl Brandon as the example of a Negro with the potential to become a member of FAPA. *The Fantasy Amateur* included a letter dated June 1956, authored by Carl Brandon, stating,

I probably wouldn't have written, after seeing Martinez's comment about what would happen if a negro applied for membership. I happen to be just that, as a few fans know—a *few* because I think it's unimportant, so I don't make an issue of it. But after the discussion in FAPA I feel it's only fair to mention it.³¹

The nonexistent fan writer named Carl Brandon thus became the person imagined by Sam Martinez's hypothetical. Tension defused quite quickly, as FAPA's elected officers responded with welcoming words for Brandon and affirmed their lack of prejudice. The editors challenged fans to speak up if they had a problem with keeping Brandon on the waiting list or admitting him as a member when the time came. No one expressed any reservations, and Carl's name rose through the ranks over the ensuing months.

One Doesn't Have to Have Intercourse

The vehicle of Martinez's provocation to FAPA should not go unremarked. Martinez raises, and then disclaims, the specter of miscegenation as a potential controversy if a Negro member were to apply to join FAPA by indicating there was no hazard of "intercourse" between fans—not because fans might not be attracted to one another across the color line but because great distances separated them. Martinez suggests that the primary threat a Negro might pose to prejudiced participants in organized fandom would come from "mixing the races." He announces, taking advantage of the hypothetical situation he has invoked, that if sex between fans became a real possibility, he would take great pleasure in trying to consummate his relationship with "fem-fans." Martinez's suggestions presume that sexuality and racial identity are linked in the minds of his fellow fans, and he also presumes that men's sexual overtures toward female virtual strangers are a legitimate source of entertainment ("it might be fun trying"). But his insinuations also inadvertently reveal how written correspondence kept questions of sexuality, gender, and racial identification at a comfortable distance from everyday conversation in fan culture. Right before Martinez issued his unnerving hypothetical, two fans had come forward to make aspects of their identities known in ways that would change the meanings of womanhood and feminism in the community.

When Carl Brandon applied for membership in FAPA, another fan had recently jumped ahead of the waiting list by using his connections to someone who was already a member: his spouse. Larry Shaw had married Lee Hoffman, a fan writer and editor who was among the most admired of her day. Hoffman had earned notoriety through her close identification with a fannish meme: "room 770." This was the number of the hotel room at the 1951 World Science Fiction Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, where Hoffman had met fellow fans in person for the first time. Previously, Shirley Hoffman had used her childhood nickname, Lee, without regard

for the assumptions that the predominantly male community of fandom would make about what her gender was. When fans met her for the first time at her hotel room in New Orleans, they were surprised and delighted by her cleverness. After much carousing in room 770, Hoffman's reputation and talent earned her the distinctive nicknames "Hoffwoman" and "Leeh," with the "h" appended to her name as a common and cryptic fannish gesture to indicate reverence (*bheer*, *ghood*, and *bhoy* are other examples).³² Larry Shaw left the waiting list to enjoy the benefits of the membership Lee Hoffman had earned after their marriage, with one subscription to *The Fantasy Amateur* addressed to both of them as "L. Shaw, Ltd." in New York.³³

The other fan to pursue a membership in FAPA through efforts that ran counter to its gendered traditions was Joan Carr. Carr had been a prolific member of the British equivalent of FAPA, the Off-Trail Magazine Publishers Association. She was known and respected as a British Army sergeant stationed in North Africa who published the only fanzine edited entirely by women, *Femizine*. *Femizine* garnered glowing reviews and an astounding level of correspondence, with fully half the people who received it in the mail writing back with their thoughts; this was an extraordinary level of participation for fanzine readers. *Femizine* continued to thrive once Carr took a break from her editorial duties. Joan Carr's long record of activity meant she was placed much higher on the waiting list for FAPA membership than another Briton, Mr. Harold P. Sanderson of Manchester. But Harold Sanderson had a good reason for his own lackluster publishing activity: he was busy writing under the pseudonym "Joan Carr" and editing *Femizine*.

Upon finding out that Sanderson was the person behind Joan Carr, Dean Grennell wrote to the secretary-treasurer of FAPA to ask him to reconcile the matter of the hoax and the hoaxer's disparate positions on the waiting list. He suggested raising Sanderson's name, then number twenty-five, to the position of Carr's, then at number ten, thus assuring that efforts in Carr's name would lead to Sanderson's membership in FAPA that much sooner. In the opinion of the secretary-treasurer, the aforementioned Vernon McCain, "the use of pen-names is well-established in the field of activity which surrounds interest in s-f and fantasy, and the right of a person to apply for membership in FAPA under hiser penname is, as far as we can see, beyond question."³⁴

Thanks to the tradition of the pseudonym, Carl Brandon could position himself in the company of "fem-fans" like Lee Hoffman and Joan Carr to

take part in a “field of activity” where identification took place according to rules that were idiosyncratic but not entirely arbitrary. Hoffman, Carr, and Brandon would each show that Sam Martinez’s innuendo was a far cry from an accurate depiction of the sexual object choices available in fandom: some of the “fem-fans” whom Martinez had positioned as the objects of his own and some hypothetical Black fan’s feared licentiousness were not fem-fans at all, and other persons whom he had assumed were men were actually women. Lee Hoffman had attained status for herself and conferred it upon the man she married, after initially portraying herself as male, and Harold Sanderson had improved his own fortunes as a male fan by advancing the efforts of British female fans. Though Sam Martinez assumed that everyone would be in on his idle speculation, he did not really know who was a “fem-fan” and who was not, and the joke turns out to be a reflection of his credulity as well as his sense of entitlement. These developments underscored how the print culture fans had built for themselves relied on concepts of identity and authorship that were largely unreliable but hardly ever contested in practice. Brandon’s amateur writing career following his identification would illustrate how, within the community of fanzine writers and readers, normative gender expression and the tendency to take Whiteness for granted gave way very easily to a contrived but fascinating construction of Blackness.

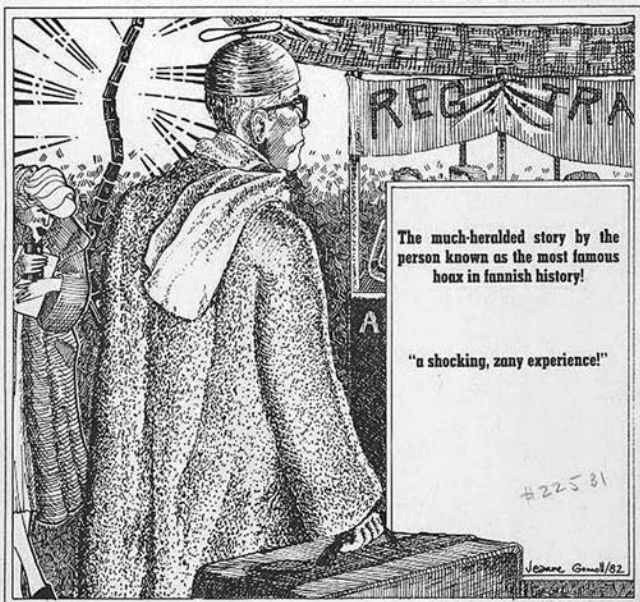
Innuendo

In the months during which Brandon’s name climbed the FAPA waiting list (he would become a member in November 1957), he published the first in a series of parody works that would secure his popularity.³⁵ Brandon’s *Cacher of the Rye* was an interpretation of J. D. Salinger’s novel published just a few years before. It was serialized in Terry Carr and Dave Rike’s fanzine *Innuendo*. The conceit of *Cacher* is that the young protagonist is kicked out of the FAPA after flunking out of several other APAs because of his lackluster activity, much like Holden Caulfield was kicked out of prep school in the story’s namesake. Numerous similar gestures to fan culture and creative acts of wordplay characterize Brandon’s style, which combined literary references with techniques of parody common within fanzines.

Brandon became known for intensely multilayered puns like those in *Cacher of the Rye*. This characterization begins with the name of his first novella. The title phrase in Salinger’s novel references Robert Burns’s

THE CACHER OF THE RYE

BY CARL BRANDON



HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION BY TERRY CARR

Cover of a commemorative edition of Carl Brandon's *Cacher of the Rye*, produced by Jeanne Gomoll and Terry Carr. From the author's collection.

"Comin' thro' the Rye," as "if a body *catch* a body coming through the rye."³⁶ Brandon makes up a version of the Burns poem as it might appear in a fanzine, singing, "You remember that take-off that went, 'If a trufan catch a trufan drinking fakefan rye?'" Lyrical parodies or takeoffs like these are a common element in the filk genre, which originated with fan-created folk songs performed at science fiction conventions. The genre context of Brandon's layered allusion changes both its meaning and its subtext. In Brandon's novella, the protagonist explains the poem's significance by

confessing that he secretly hopes to keep “true fans” drinking “bheer,” because only “fakefans” drink rye—spirits, that is. He wishes he could hide away bottles of spirits in a secret cache. Hence the horrible pun: “cacher of the rye.” Brandon’s explanation regarding the source of the poem is even more peculiar to the context in which the story is published. Whereas the protagonist’s sister, Phoebe, corrects Holden Caulfield’s misreading of the Burns poem in the novel, the protagonist’s sister confirms rather than disputes the source of the reference in Brandon’s novella. When Brandon mentions the takeoff including the phrase “drinking fakefan rye,” the character says, “It was in *Ploy* #1.”³⁷ The joke here is that there was no such thing as *Ploy* #1; the first issue of the fanzine called *Ploy*, published by Rike and Carr’s British friend Ron Bennett, was titled *Ploy* #2. The numbering was an inside joke Bennett had played on his peers to send them off on a fruitless search for the first issue of his fanzine. Brandon references a fictitious source of knowledge, couched within what is already an inside joke, to outperform insiders at their own game.³⁸ The acrobatic degree of innuendo in this and many other allusions in *Cacher of the Rye* secured Brandon a reputation as a fan writer to be reckoned with.

In addition to treatments of contemporary literature, Brandon wrote several short parodies that some of his contemporaries found familiar from childhood. Among these was a short romance called “Sixteen,” which he wrote in the first person under the name Carla Brandon.³⁹ One fan from Washington, D.C., indicated that he had read the original before, in high school, and so had Larry Stark, who was so impressed that he asked to publish Brandon’s work for his own fanzine.⁴⁰ Brandon published “Sixteen” through the Cult, along with an impressive long-form follow-up to *Cacher in the Rye* that garnered comparisons to much-lauded *The Enchanted Duplicator*. It was called *The BNF of Iz*. Whereas the 1939 film version of *The Wizard of Oz* is the dominant frame of reference for the story among today’s readers, L. Frank Baum’s Oz series was a formative reading experience in the fantasy genre for FAPA members who had read it as children. FAPA members writing in the 1950s also did not have the opportunity to experience *The Wizard of Oz* in the formats that current audiences might imagine: home video and color television. Brandon’s story would adapt visual and textual elements from the original print work by Baum while also incorporating references to the film and stylistic elements of fan writing.

Brandon’s reproduction of Dorothy’s journey from the mundane world to an enchanted land of fandom synthesizes Baum’s fanciful prose with

the colorful dream world of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer adaptation. It was intent on succeeding Willis's precedent as a comprehensive treatment of science fiction fandom from the perspective of amateur humorists. At various times, Willis's influence is so pronounced that even the characters in *BNF of Iz* believe they are going to find the Enchanted Duplicator.⁴¹ After a cyclone deposits Dorothy on the purple brick road—invoking the emblematic quality of the color of hekto and mimeo inks—she joins the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsfan, and a cowardly Lion who shies away from feuds with other writers to seek out the Big Name Fan (BNF) who can send her home.

Like *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Wizard of Oz* had mapped certain moral quandaries for its characters onto locations in a fictitious world, setting the stage for subsequent texts (like *The Enchanted Duplicator*) to represent different moral and ethical themes in spatial terms. In *The BNF of Iz*, Dorothy and her companions begin their journey by learning of the challenges they will face in various lands. In keeping with the boundaries around Baum's Land of Oz, all of Iz is surrounded by a "desert called Public Contempt."⁴² Many of the parallels between *Enchanted Duplicator* and *BNF of Iz* occur in the chapter of Brandon's text titled "Proville." Whereas Willis provided a veritable taxonomy of fandom across several chapters in his allegory, "Proville" provides a snapshot of every class of writers in fandom living alongside one another—aspiring professionals, hucksters who want to make money from fanzines, serious constructive ("sercon") amateur critics who are too concerned with science fiction, and benevolent, overworked professional editors.

The social schema of fandom envisioned in *BNF of Iz* positions high-caliber humorists as superior fans. When Brandon's heroes finally reach the BNF's "slan-palace" in the Amber City (another reference to van Vogt), they learn that the Wicked Witch is a "non-fan," and the adventurers must destroy her with a fan-made concoction called Blog. *Blog*, like *slan*, is another term that marks a comprehension divide between fans and mundane readers. Invoking the term Blog was like alluding to "Ploy #1"—there is no real-life referent for the substance, and coincidentally, Blog is also British. The Liverpool Science Fiction Society identified a beverage called Blog as the sponsor for the audiotope opera they performed at the British National Science Fiction Convention in 1955. At the convention hotel, fans hung a banner touting "Drink Blog" over the bar, but unwitting passersby went thirsty when they ordered it, because Blog didn't exist.⁴³

Like Willis's allegory before it, Brandon's parody is full of fictionalized versions of real fans; for instance, the character named Perfexion in

Enchanted Duplicator was Willis's homage to his colleague Vincent Clarke, and King John of Brandon's "Proville" is the beloved editor of *Astounding* magazine, John Campbell. Brandon's villains represent fans of questionable integrity. On the way to defeat the Witch, Dorothy encounters a "weird fan" who chases away the little red bug with whom she'd been speaking. The characterization of the weird fan is rich but intricate.⁴⁴ "That was just Jack Fugghead," the Scarecrow explains. "He hates colors . . . especially black and red. . . . He's an authority on H.P. Hatecraft."⁴⁵ Tying the color-prejudiced "weird fan" to the star author of *Weird Tales* magazine, H. P. Lovecraft, cements this caricature: Jack Fugghead is meant to represent George Wetzel, a Lovecraft disciple whom Terry Carr called "a notorious racist."⁴⁶ Dorothy's companions discover the other antagonist in the story, the Wicked non-fan, after they find Dorothy tied to a pillar. By dissolving the pillar with Blog to free Dorothy, the Tin Woodsfan reveals that the pillar itself had been the Wicked non-fan in disguise:

When I found that my axe wouldn't scratch the pillar, I deduced that it was some sort of magic cast by the witch. I looked closer, and found that it was just a hoax, because on the base of the pillar it said PILLAR OF THE NAMELESS ONES. Well, when I read that, I knew it was the Wicked Witch hiding there, hoping to fool us into turning our backs for just a moment. When I poured the Blog on her, she was liquidated!⁴⁷

"The Nameless Ones" were the Seattle, Washington, based fans whose official organ was called *Cry of the Nameless Ones*. The one member who held a singularly unfavorable reputation among them, derided as a "non-fan" because she didn't contribute to publishing *Cry*, was the aforementioned Gertrude M. Carr.⁴⁸

In a final gesture that brings together the influences on Brandon's version of the Oz legend, the last page in an illustrated version of *BNF of Iz* modifies the style of one of John R. Neill's illustrations from a *Wizard of Oz* sequel by Baum, *The Road to Oz*.⁴⁹ In *BNF of Iz*, the subject matter of the illustration is, in fact, derived from the film version of *Wizard of Oz* in which Dorothy has dreamt her entire journey. In the original text, the far-off Land of Oz was no dream.⁵⁰ Ted White's studied illustration enhances Brandon's work by bringing together visual texts with a strong presence in the zeitgeist: John R. Neill's memorable illustrations and the imagery from the film. White, who would go on to become an influential author and editor of science fiction magazines, situates this composite image within the context of Brandon's story by placing the signature of

self-deprecating iconography in fandom, the propeller beanie, at the head of Dorothy's bed.

During and after the hoax, Brandon's *BNF of Iz* became a lasting influence on fans' interpretation of *The Wizard of Oz*. Along with the connections it made across several print works and several modes of visual media, the collaborative composition of *BNF of Iz* attests to the collective commitment that fans knowingly and unknowingly made to sustaining Carl Brandon's work. Terry Carr and Ron Ellick wrote different portions of the story under Carl Brandon's name for its 1957 publication, and Ted White (who, like most people, still thought Brandon was a real person in 1957) illustrated a later version.⁵¹ Ted White pointed out that writings like Brandon's helped fans to achieve a level-headed perspective "on fandom as it is, for better or worse," enabling them to respond to criticism while they enjoyed their peers' efforts at the same time. "At its highest," he wrote, the irreverent strain of writing identified with Brandon "produces outstanding pieces such as *The Enchanted Duplicator* and *The BNF of Iz*."⁵²

In August 1958, on the strength of his growing reputation as a writer and the continuing success of the hoax, Terry Carr and his friends nominated Carl Brandon for official editor of the FAPA. He ran in opposition to Dick Eney and Ted White, neither of whom knew that Brandon was made up, despite the fact that they had worked together on fanzines.⁵³ The role of official editor came with a great deal of responsibility; each of the fanzines published through FAPA was first mailed to the official editor before they were all collated for distribution along with *The Fantasy Amateur*. At the time of the FAPA election, the last parody Carl Brandon would ever claim to write had just been published. In a three-part series titled *On the Road*, Terry Carr took aim at the emerging hipster/beatnik lifestyle through a "Brandonization" of Jack Kerouac's newly released novel of the same name.

Post-Beatnik Fandom

Fandom and the Beats had several reasons to converge as part of Carl Brandon's career. Terry Carr lived in San Francisco and Berkeley throughout the period when the Beat movement took root. The moment in American cultural history at which the fanzines referenced in this chapter were circulating was contemporaneous with the emergence of the Beat generation. The phrase "Beat generation" entered the popular lexicon through John Clellon Holmes's articles in the *New York Times* and his novel *Go* in

1952.⁵⁴ The term *beatnik* was applied to the Beats amid the dissemination of the Russian suffix (-*nik*) following the Soviet launch of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, which inaugurated the space age. Carl Brandon's name first appears in a book-length history of science fiction fandom in a chapter by rich brown titled "Post-Sputnik Fandom."⁵⁵ Though it seems current to call Brandon's era "post-Sputnik" from our perspective today, the nomenclature used by brown portrays science and technology as more important periodizing influences than they actually were in the lives of science fiction fans writing in the era.

Many fan historians, including Sam Moskowitz, whose book *Immortal Storm* served as an authoritative history of the recent past for fans in the 1950s, entertained the notion of numbered fandoms beginning with James Fitzgerald's era, the First. Terry Carr and Carl Brandon were, according to their own peers, part of "Seventh Fandom." With his title "Post-Sputnik Fandom," rich brown signified a break from the inward-looking tendencies that prevailed among fanzine writers. Instead, he gestures toward the most recognizable body of knowledge associated with science fiction in the wider public: science. He reminds readers that science fiction fandom and the amateur publishing community it inspired took shape within the popular culture of the United States, which is important to bear in mind when thinking about Carl Brandon's writing and its sources in relation to other literary genres.

When the Beat movement began, science fiction might have had a declining influence on the reading public for a number of reasons, even among ardent fans. *Weird Tales*, the prototypical pulp serial that started in 1923, had tried and failed to change its format to keep up with more successful magazines, but it ceased publishing in 1954.⁵⁶ A devastating strike at the American News Company, the largest magazine and book distributor in the United States and the one that handled most science fiction publications, slowed their operations in 1955 and led to the distributor closing down in 1957.⁵⁷ Some of the science fiction works that formed the basis for shared references in late 1950s fanzines were in fact a decade or more old, part of the genre's golden age. The *Slan* stories by van Vogt had originally appeared in *Astounding* in the 1940s, but they were finally novelized in 1952; the stories in the *Martian Chronicles*, most of which had come to light before 1950, continued to shape Ray Bradbury's reputation among fans.⁵⁸ With little new material in the genre coming to the market, fanzine writers in the late 1950s might have been reading more material that was not science fiction than they had before. Brandon's

choices of themes after “Brain Ripple” suggest that his writing (by way of Terry Carr and Dave Rike) was inspired by other trends in contemporary literature. The treatment of the Beats represented by Brandon’s *On the Road* thus offers a unique interpretation of the movement through the lens of a critical apparatus—the burlesque tradition in amateur publishing—which is seldom counted among established venues for the interpretation of postwar literature.

The 1958 publication of Brandon’s *On the Road* in Carr and Dave Rike’s *Innuendo* recounts a fan’s sudden inspiration to hitchhike from one science fiction convention to another, learning the art of fandom along the way.⁵⁹ The story followed the style of Kerouac’s original, but its details were inspired by the adventures of Terry Carr’s contemporary Ron Ellik, who had once hitchhiked across the country and back to attend a World Science Fiction Convention in New York.⁶⁰ In 1955, Dave Rike also recounts a hitchhiking trip to visit Terry Carr in San Francisco in the fanzine where he had printed Carl Brandon’s earliest work, “Brain Ripple.” In their letters of comment on Carl Brandon’s version of *On the Road*, fans repeatedly observed that they were inspired to read the original only after reading the parody, just as many said they’d only read Salinger after reading Brandon’s *Catcher of the Rye*.⁶¹ Roger Horrocks appraised *On the Road*, noting, “The latest Brandon satire (parody, burlesque, pastiche—check one) is really excellent.”⁶² His reflections recognize Brandon, the Black fan whose identity most readers did not yet know was a fiction, as an innovator within a well-regarded interpretive tradition.

In recognizing that Brandon accrued an ego-boosting sense of belonging within fandom while simultaneously garnering a reputation as “fandom’s literary translator”⁶³ through works like *On the Road*, we might reevaluate the utility of whimsy and burlesque as modes of criticism. The technique of Brandonization relies on making connections between genres even as it relies on a high degree of insularity. Just as fandom made a mockery of genre conventions, including its own, the Beats embraced travesty in all its manifestations. Moral outrage, uninhibited sexual innuendo, drug-altered perception, the irreverent appropriation of religious iconography, and the conceptualization of intimacy across racial and ethnic lines all formed essential parts of the Beat aesthetic. A shared effort to change the aims with which insulting and debased language could be used along with a habit of defying the formal strictures on writing and publishing attest to a shared set of approaches to literature linking fandom and the Beats.

A stylized rejection of mainstream lifestyles and tastes characterized Beat poets as an avant-garde, and fanzine writers, in a pattern that continues throughout cultural activities associated with speculative fiction, celebrated their own marginal status within culture. A shared interest in distancing themselves from current trends might explain why fans, like the Beats, gravitated toward less popular aspects of music, for example. Terry Carr and Peter Graham styled themselves “moldy figs,” aficionados of traditional jazz and blues, and they bequeathed this preference to Carl Brandon, as well.⁶⁴ “Turn in your Moldy Fig button,” Brandon wrote to Larry Stark on one occasion. “You don’t even seem to know what the blues form is.”⁶⁵ The Beats, who were forward looking rather than nostalgic, bent an ear to bop. The two groups were equally suspicious of commercial entertainments such as popular music, like generations of self-styled dissidents before and after.⁶⁶

In its most queer affinity with the Beat movement, however, fandom produced off-brand Negroes like James Fitzgerald and Carl Brandon, whose participation in a genre far removed from the currents of popular culture called their Blackness into question. In light of the appreciation he showed for contemporary fiction in his other parodic works, we might read Brandon’s playful mockery in *On the Road* as a rather warm reception for the Beat aesthetic. The Beat movement had, after all, produced a kindred spirit for Carl Brandon in Bob Kaufman, the Black hipster poet. With James Fitzgerald in both of their family trees, Bob Kaufman and Carl Brandon shared in an inherited role to bring alternatives to popular culture to the attention of discerning readers. In both their cases, as in Fitzgerald’s before them, Blackness became an integral part of their cultural dissidence precisely because of their participation in readership communities that were predominantly White. Fitzgerald, Kaufman, and Brandon never became as iconic as their contemporaries in areas of culture that were more readily identifiable with Blackness, but instead, they became exceptions that proved the rule regarding the Whiteness of science fiction and the Whiteness of the hipster.⁶⁷

When Kerouac’s *On the Road* came to the attention of critics and the general public in the form of a novel, it retained only rumors of the formal element that had made it such an innovation in the first place. *On the Road* was written on one long, continuous scroll fed through a typewriter. If it was the trace of a deviant and anachronistic form, rather than its timely content, that lent force to the Beat aesthetic, we might observe how fanzines demonstrated a similar obsession with obsolescent

writing technologies. As I have discussed, FAPA maintained a structure built around the hektograph long into the era of the mimeograph, for reasons that were social rather than technological. Fan writings like *The Enchanted Duplicator*, *The Daring Young Fan with the Three-Speed Mimeo*, and *The BNF of Iz* relied on readers' awareness of historical shifts in methods of document reproduction within the amateur press, as did the provocative statement Dean Grennell made with his investment in publishing *Grue*. So, though we may approach Brandon's legacy through his relationship to the genres of science fiction and fantasy, the bildungsroman, and the emergent Beat movement, his story always returns to the question of how cultural politics are articulated and reproduced in texts—the question with which he originated.

I'm with You in Rockland

Technologies of writing and reproduction eventually spelled the end of Carl Brandon's illustrious and illusory career. Carr recounts Brandon's exit from fandom years later, in an essay printed with a commemorative edition of *Cacher of the Rye*.⁶⁸ At the World Science Fiction Convention in Southgate, California, in August 1958, while Carl Brandon was leading in votes for official editor of FAPA, Terry Carr signed Brandon's name to a postcard that would be sent by Ron Bennett to England. Ted White, seated next to them, looked quizzically at the signature. He asked, "What is this doing here?" Carr responded,

"I put it there."

"You see, Carl doesn't exist. He's just a hoax."

"I don't believe you," [Ted White] said flatly. But he continued to stare at Carl's signature—he'd received a lot of letters from Carl. Finally, I got out a piece of paper and wrote, "This is Carl's handwriting. Recognize it?"

Brandon was disqualified from the election, and Ted White became official editor of FAPA. Because Terry Carr was already a member of FAPA, and Peter Graham had helped invent Carl, Graham took credit for the work published under the pseudonym. This meant that Graham's name ascended from the waiting list into the ranks of FAPA members.⁶⁹

Gone but not forgotten, fans tried desperately to hold on to the memory of Carl Brandon, maintaining their attachment to two facts about him above all others. Their first priority was to reaffirm their attitudes toward Carl Brandon's Blackness, even though it had never existed. They also

Invective; XI--Iconoclastic Koning

car there too. I'll admit that Donaho's articles are funny, but I don't believe them. They aren't realistic enough. (Truth is stranger than Factual Articles.)

Myghod, if I could write a request like Ashworth, I would never need to pay for anything.

It seems you are building this tower all wrong. By the time someone climbs to the top with a basket of empty beer cans he is bushed. Why not make every one out of ten cans used in the tower full; then the climber could refresh himself on the way up. As you get higher, too, you will need a comfort stop or two, so just completely remove the tops of a few cans and leave them in conspicuous places.

For your next project, why not a beer-can pipeline between Berkeley and Milwaukee?

Sinceahly,

John Koning

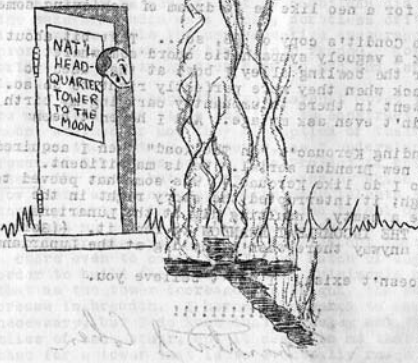
ESMOND ADAMS, 433 Locust Ave., S.E., Huntsville, Alabama

I don't think Parents' Magazine would approve of your project. Beer cans, teh. Detrimental influence on the country's youth. My friends and I are going to speak to the authorities and we have quite a bit of influence and we'll get you if you don't cut out this Communism here trying to wreck my country's youth. You better watch out. It's people like you that are ruining this country with things like this. I think you should be put in jail. You don't deserve to call yourselves Americans, tearing at the Foundations and all like this.

Brandon a hoax? Nonono sob. And sniffle. Why can't it be one of the rest of you? I like Brandon best of the whole scurvy crew. (Pretty stirring writing there, eh?)

By Gar I like INN. Terry Carr, with more sincerity than I can muster up to put into this letter. Sincerity. You know the word, anyway. INN isn't the sort of thing to bring wide-eyed comments of Gosh Mr. Carr But I Really Enjoyed Your Magazine And It Really Was Good Will You Print My Ad In The Next Issue of It Sir?, so I hope you'll forgive my trying to be sincere in the hollow-laughter fannish sense, whatever that is.

Best. *ES*



Letters of comment reproduced in issue #9 of the fanzine *Innuendo*, with a line drawing depicting a door to the headquarters of the Bay Area fans' putative "Tower to the Moon" project. The macabre impression seared into the ground by a burned cross in the drawing evokes animosity toward the group of fans that includes Carl Brandon. From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

recounted with great fondness a plot among the Bay Area fans to build a Tower to the Moon out of Bheer Cans in Carl Brandon's backyard. A letter to *Innuendo* after the hoax was exposed chided Terry Carr and his cohorts for their Tower to the Moon gambit, playfully calling it a bad influence on the country's youth and a communistic plot. The same letter tearfully lamented the passing of the Brandon hoax and expressed the wish that Brandon was real and one of the other Bay Area writers was a fiction: "Why can't it be one of the rest of you? I like Brandon best of the whole scurvy crew."⁷⁰ In a cartoon accompanying that letter, a fan cowers behind a door labeled "National Headquarters Tower to the Moon Project," where, outside, someone has burned a cross on his lawn. Not ironically, this image conveys a double meaning. The same opponents of the Bheer Can project who opposed it as a communist plot would be likely to share the sentiments of White nationalists displeased with Brandon's presence in an interracial den of iniquity.

Upon Brandon's departure, Walt Willis wrote, "In its short but vivid lifetime, younger San Francisco fandom has produced two remarkable things, Carl Brandon and a tower to the Moon made out of beer cans, and until a few days ago I was quite sure I knew which of them was imaginary. Nowadays I wear a crash helmet every time the Moon is in the east."⁷¹ He continued, "This handsome young soft-spoken Negro with his lazily brilliant wit and thoughtful mind was an asset to fandom and I think we should keep him. . . . Carl Brandon doesn't exist; very well, it is necessary to create him." Willis characterizes Brandon's "brilliant wit" as lazy, only to supplement this lapse in his laudatory tone by appraising Brandon's "thoughtful mind." The reference is contradictory, showing the ambivalence with which fans reluctantly said good-bye to Carl Brandon. This ambivalence suggests that Brandon's departure raised the discomfiting possibility that fans were not as enlightened toward Black people as his presence made them think they were. Unlike the moment of his emergence, in which Brandon himself downplayed the significance of his racial identification as an "unimportant" fact shared among a privileged few, the moment of Brandon's departure made the meaning of Blackness in fandom a problem that White fans would have to think about all by themselves.

By far the best farewell to Brandon was Nick and Noreen Falasca's tribute in their 1959 fanzine *The Devil's Motorboat*. The Falascas write that Carl Brandon is not gone, nor was he a hoax, but instead that he had been spirited away to a mental institution in Rockland County, New York. The evidence they cite for this comes from an alleged visit to Sacramento,

California, where, according to Terry Carr and his neighbors, Carl Brandon always seemed to be conveniently away visiting his grandmother whenever fans came to Berkeley hoping to meet him. In an editorial titled “The Truth about Carl Brandon,” the Falascas write,

In a dingy cubicle in an unused wing at Rockland State Hospital there lies a man. . . . He is kept under constant sedation. . . . His identity is kept secret. His only visitor is a wizened old negress who travels cross country from Sacramento once a month to gaze dolefully at the unconscious body.⁷²

Ambivalence is the order of the day here, as well, as the unwitting Falascas refer to Carl Brandon’s fictitious Black grandmother as a “negress,” in anachronistic and sexist rhetoric that racist writers had used to characterize Negroes and animals alike. In the same fanzine where they wrote the preceding account, the Falascas published a sensational tribute to Carl. With a poem titled “Yowl for Carl Brandon,” they tapped into the sensational fervor around Allen Ginsberg’s Beat poetry anthem “Howl (for Carl Solomon).” Allen Ginsberg wrote, “Carl Solomon! I’m with you in Rockland / where you’re madder than I am.” The author of “Yowl for Carl Brandon,” who uses the pseudonym Xavier Ginsberg, writes,

Carl Brandon! I’m with you in Rockland . . .
where there is no cult or FAPA
I’m with you in Rockland
where you dream of slanshacks waving in the summer breeze

Of course, the real Carl Solomon writes that he never spent time at Rockland State Hospital.⁷³ That was a bit of inspired fan fiction on the part of Allen Ginsberg.

Carl Solomon’s uncle was A. A. Wyn, founder of the publishing company that housed Ace Books. Solomon worked for his uncle in the 1950s with Donald Wollheim, the founder of FAPA who had established a new relationship to science fiction as a professional editor. Allen Ginsberg, who had met Carl Solomon in a different psychiatric institute in New York, acted as a literary agent for William S. Burroughs, and he became reacquainted with Solomon when Ace published *Junkie* under Burroughs’s pseudonym, William Lee.⁷⁴ Ginsberg wrote “Howl” after he heard that his friend Solomon was returning to hospital care for mental illness.

Carl Brandon returned in 1962, when Terry Carr submitted a story in Brandon’s name to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, thereby making his Black alter ego a professional writer. In Brandon’s story, titled

“Stanley Toothbrush,” a man finds that he can wish people in and out of existence by repeating their names over and over again. In the biography accompanying Brandon’s publication, the magazine’s editor, Avram Davidson, writes that Carl Brandon lives in Rockland County, New York.⁷⁵

Twenty years later, graphic artist Jeanne Gomoll produced a commemorative edition of *Cacher of the Rye* including Terry Carr’s biographical essay on Carl Brandon, “The Fake Fan,” using a Compugraphic Typesetter at the Brian Yocom Printing Company in Madison, Wisconsin.⁷⁶ Gomoll published this edition of *Cacher of the Rye* for the Feminist Science Fiction Convention held in Madison in 1982, where Terry Carr was the guest of honor. Carr had since become a well-known professional editor who published numerous science fiction novels while he worked for Donald Wollheim at Ace in the 1960s. Terry Carr’s co-honoree in 1982 was SF writer Suzette Haden Elgin. Carr and Wollheim had published Elgin’s *Coyote Jones* sequence, along with works by Avram Davidson, the immensely popular Philip K. Dick, and feminist SF luminary Ursula K. Le Guin, in their Ace Science Fiction specials series, contributing to a revival of the genre.⁷⁷

Fifteen years after that, a group of fans gathered at the annual Feminist Science Fiction Convention in Madison (WisCon) to discuss ways to promote dialogue and awareness about racism, identity, and culture in the writing and publication of speculative fiction and to promote the work of SF writers of color. As their inspiration, they took cues from the creators of the James Tiptree Jr. literary award. The Tiptree Award recognizes SF authors whose work promotes critical thinking about issues of gender. It was named for writer Alice Bradley Sheldon, who had used the pseudonym James Tiptree Jr. to publish her science fiction works with a male persona during the 1970s. The exposure of Tiptree’s gender was an object lesson for fans and writers regarding their attitudes toward women. As Julie Phillips’s biography of Sheldon notes, reconsidering Tiptree’s legacy requires readers to examine an era when women were participating more than ever in forms of writing and publishing—science fiction and fanzines—that had been dominated by men. The organization that started by thinking about issues of race at WisCon, following the example set by the James Tiptree award committee, is now called the Carl Brandon Society.

Josh Brandon’s Blues

I have used Carl Brandon as a lens through which to view a moment in the development of a community around speculative fiction and the creative

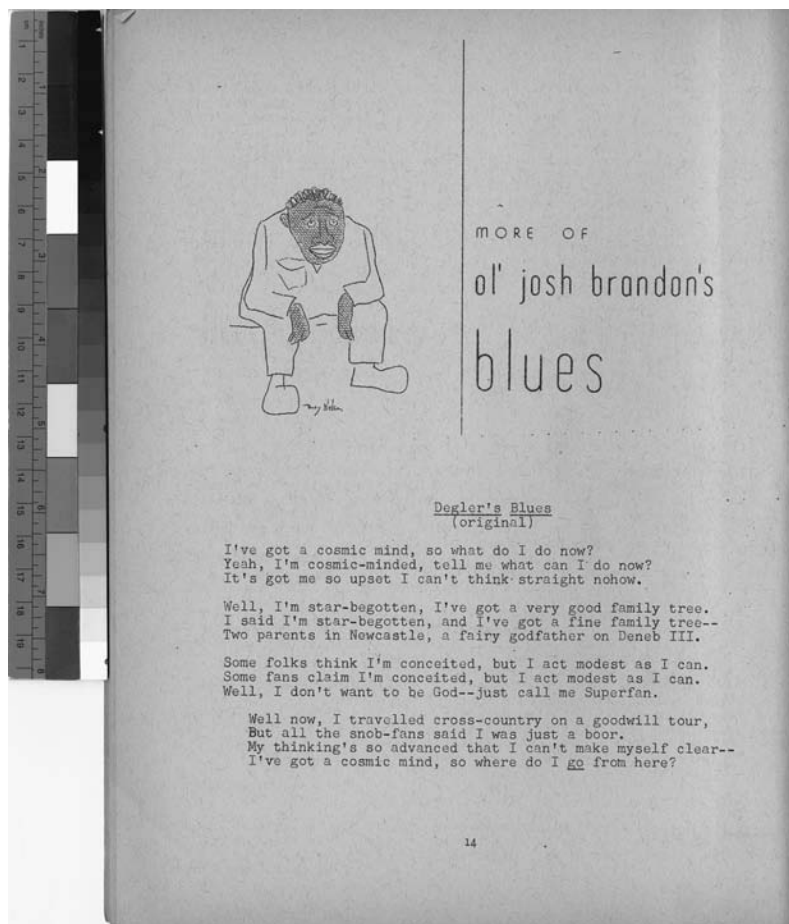
use of media, and I have reasserted Brandon's Blackness as an essential feature in my examination of this moment because the fake fan made his participation in the network of relations among fans notable through his self-identification as a Negro. Although Carl Brandon emerged to inoculate fans against the charge of racial exclusion, the fact that he did not exist and disappeared before another fan identified herself as Black left the presumptive Whiteness of science fiction intact. By understanding the means of producing Brandon's Blackness, however, we can recognize its continuity with the race thinking in science fiction fandom, rather than treating it as a lacuna. Interpreting the first letter that firmly identifies Carl Brandon's textual persona with Blackness requires us to invoke a chain of correspondence reaching back to August 1954. When Carr made a splash by identifying Brandon as Black, fans were already in the middle, not at the beginning or the end, of a long dialogue about the meaning of Blackness in their community. This dialogue looks backward to James Fitzgerald and forward to the continuing work of the Carl Brandon Society.

One of the last contributions to fanzines associated with Carl Brandon was a series of song parodies called "Josh Brandon's Blues."⁷⁸ The Bay Area fans had already established their interest in the blues as an aspect of their obscurantist subculture. In view of this, we might regard the "moldy fig" enthusiasm ascribed to Carl Brandon not as an authenticating feature of his persona but as a "tell," as a hint that he was secretly a figment of White writers' imaginations all along: a Black version of themselves.

The "Josh Brandon's Blues" lyrics are vintage Carl Brandon: "Gafia in Mind," published in Ted White's fanzine *Null-F*, recasts the song "Trouble in Mind" with a motif that would be familiar to fanzine writers. GAFIA was an acronym for "getting away from it all," or taking a break from fanzines. The original composition "Degler's Blues," incorporates references to the H. G. Wells novel *Star-Begotten* and life on planets around distant suns, as well as a fan's name. "Towner Hall Blues," which included a note indicating it should be sung to the tune of "Basin Street Blues," is a tribute to Ted and Sylvia White's Manhattan apartment where they had produced many fanzines and spent time carousing with friends such as Lee Hoffman. "Basin Street Blues" also uses the phrases "star-begot" and "Gestetner, typers, and all," emphasizing the preoccupations of Brandon's creators.⁷⁹

The most interesting element of the blues writings (authored by Terry Carr) was the illustration that accompanied them. With one exception, the "Josh Brandon's Blues" texts were published after the hoax of Brandon's

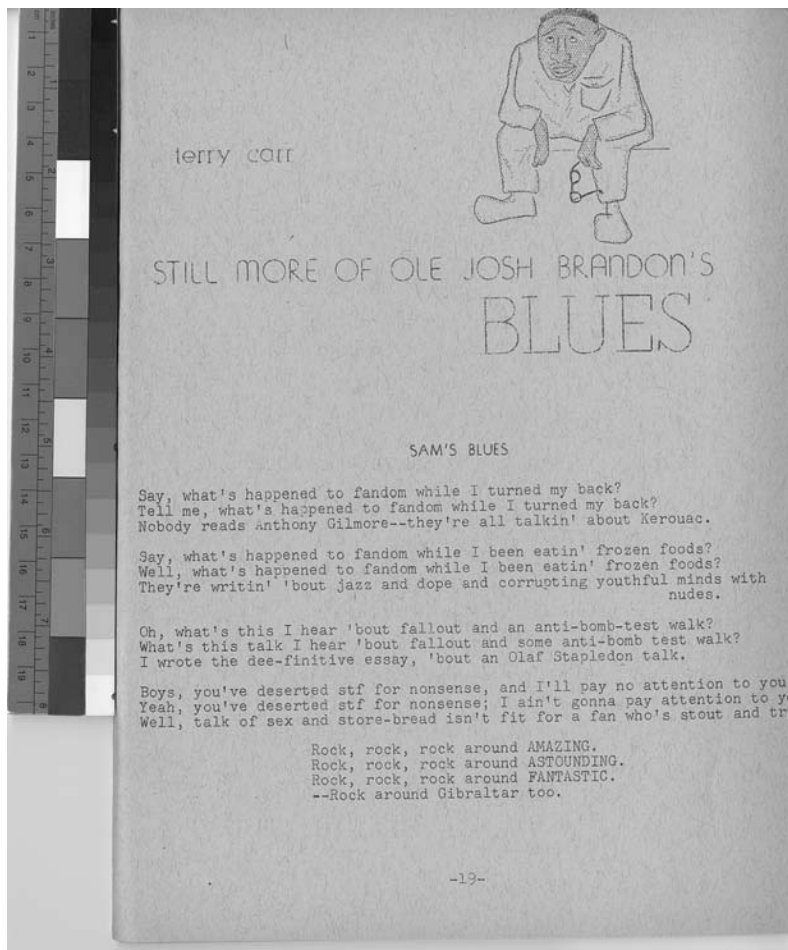
identity had been exposed.⁸⁰ With the publication of "More of Ol' Josh Brandon's Blues" and "Still More of Ole Josh Brandon's Blues," Blackness was indelibly embedded in Carl Joshua Brandon's identity. The image of Brandon after the fictive nature of his Blackness came to light was that of a homely, somewhat aged blues man crafted by Ray Nelson rather than the handsome, soft-spoken Negro drawn by Peter Graham and celebrated by Walt Willis years before. It was clear, at that point, that Carl Brandon



Shaded line drawing made to evoke the image of Carl Brandon as a blues musician, accompanying "More of Ol' Josh Brandon's Blues," verse attributed to the pseudonymous Black fan writer. This drawing appeared in issue #6 of the fanzine *Verkarte Nacht*. From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

was always already a cipher for what fans thought about the meaning of Blackness in their community.

By treating genres as a matter of relationships between people as well as between texts, writing in Brandon's name had reminded his readers that they could become authors. They could take ownership of the contexts in which they read and of the readings they performed. In view of



Shaded line drawing made to evoke the image of Carl Brandon as a blues musician, accompanying "Still More of Ole Josh Brandon's Blues," verse attributed to the pseudonymous Black fan writer. This drawing appeared in issue #22 of the fanzine *Null-F* From the Holdings of Special Collections and Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

this legacy, the representation of Blackness in “Josh Brandon’s Blues” is particularly unflattering. There is a certain failure of imagination at work in the depiction of Brandon according to a stereotypical blues man’s image. The youthful, glasses-wearing, Berkeley-dwelling, Bob Kaufman-acting, James Fitzgerald-recalling, tower-building, backyard-having, NFFF-bashing, moldy fig, Sacramento-visiting, post-Sputnik avatar of Seventh Fandom was eclipsed by a caricature that looked much more like Nick and Noreen Falasca’s “wizened old negress.”

Each of the texts that imagined Carl Brandon represents neither the first nor the last encounter between Blackness and science fiction fandom. Each is the next in a long succession of efforts to think creatively about the way race and genre function in relation to amateur and professional cultural production. The archive that Brandon leaves behind suggests that we do not necessarily need to privilege the first encounter between Blackness and speculative fiction, because each interpretation casts its precedents in a new light. Fortunately, the end of Carl Brandon was not the end of a legacy either. His appearance was a milestone in an ongoing dialogue about how the reading, writing, and reproduction of the meaning of Blackness can break the chain of correspondence between racial boundaries, on one hand, and the boundaries of genre, on the other. His disappearance ultimately reminds us that those conversations are limited, but not meaningless, when only White readers and writers take part.

2

SPACE RACE WOMAN

Lieutenant Uhura beyond the Bridge

IN THE 1960S, THE NOTION THAT SPACE EXPLORATION could inspire Americans to leave behind our chauvinist ideals was articulated more thoroughly by science fiction than it was put into practice by our new space program. Simple prejudice might account for the absence of women and people of color from both endeavors, but a closer examination of the politics of space exploration, real and imagined, indicates that space was constructed as yet another frontier to be conquered by both NASA and speculative fiction. Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars fiction had clumsily planted a former Confederate soldier on the Red Planet and offered him a princess and hostile natives, but the most enduring vision of the future in twentieth-century popular media was slightly more subtle.¹ Gene Roddenberry promised "a wagon train to the stars" with his new TV series. *Star Trek* famously showcased a "final frontier" for its audience, and a diverse cast seemed to embody the future on its set. It changed the way television audiences thought about space and the way that critics and professionals concerned with space related to television audiences; to do so, it had to change the way we thought about race, gender, and sexuality.

Constance Penley singles out NASA's dealings with female astronauts as one aspect of how they failed to assure the public that their vision of utopia was as compelling as the one available through *Star Trek*. She examines the twin phenomena of NASA as a national treasure and *Star Trek* as a utopian vision in *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. Her study emphasizes the feminist implications of women's engagement with popular media, a hallmark of scholarship on fandom, yet it fails to recognize the significance of performances of Black womanhood to popular

science and media alike. While Penley proposes to rewrite NASA the way fans rewrite *Star Trek*, Nichelle Nichols, as the actor who portrayed Uhura on the starship *Enterprise* and, later, as the celebrity recruiter who diversified the astronaut corps, rewrites the relationship Penley calls “NASA/Trek.”² The ambivalence about gender, sexuality, and science that Penley observes in *Star Trek* and NASA, as well as their shared shortcomings with respect to addressing racial inequality through their utopian overtures, deserves the kind of consideration that might result from situating Nichelle Nichols centrally in the analysis of both phenomena. In the period when *Star Trek* emerged, and in the years afterward as space exploration became more of a reality through the American space program, the feminist science fiction movement also aspired to change the way the public viewed women, scientific discourse, and the uses of the imagination. Because of the ways in which Black women have been marginalized in the production of popular culture, including the relative alienation of Black women from the SF genre’s conventional ways of envisioning race, gender, and sexuality, Nichelle Nichols, I argue, has yet to be recognized for her transformative contributions to the public interrogation of questions at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and utopian discourse.

Hailing Frequencies Open

In her memoir *Beyond Uhura*, Nichelle Nichols articulates a desire to move past her typecast position as a minor character in genre television by describing how she played the starring role in a story about marginalization. The terms on which Nichols participated in *Trek* demonstrate how its utopian vision allowed practices of labor and sexuality to remain unchanged from her purview as a Black female actor. She was compelled to perform similar roles on-screen and backstage, as an accomplice to her own subordination. When she recruited for NASA, however, Nichols subverted her singular responsibility as the embodiment of utopia in *Trek* to engender broad-based changes in actual space exploration. As a rejoinder to the critical intervention into popular science Penley begins in *NASA/Trek*, I will retread Nichelle Nichols’s difficult trajectory from *Star Trek* to NASA. Unlike other *Star Trek* studies, this discussion focuses on an actor’s work, rather than the broader *Trek* universe and enduring legacy of fandom in which she plays an admittedly understated role. Nichols’s travails as Uhura and beyond demonstrate how she is instrumental to, and in part responsible for, the utopian promises of both *Trek* and NASA.

The limited uses that traditional Hollywood casting has devised for Black women's bodies on television made a very limited set of roles—often implausible, degrading, and exploitative—available to Black female actors like Nichols. After an acclivitous stage career, Nichols's first television role placed her in the employ of Gene Roddenberry. She was cast in an episode of a TV series called *The Lieutenant*, which Roddenberry directed, in 1963. She featured alongside Don Marshall, who, she notes, later starred in *Land of the Giants*.³ With work scarce for Black actors in any television or film genre, Nichols's and Marshall's transitions to space opera and alternate-universe adventures did not make much of a difference when it came to lines or significance to plot in their respective series. However, Nichols's role in *Star Trek*, after Roddenberry developed the project, confronted her with a different kind of departure from convention.

When a young Whoopi Goldberg first saw Uhura on the bridge, she ran through the house, shouting, "Everybody, come quick! There's a Black lady on television, and she ain't no maid!"⁴ The precedent set by Hattie McDaniel's 1939 Oscar win for portraying Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* exemplifies a conundrum within twentieth-century regimes of gender, work, and race. One of the sources of division in mid-twentieth-century feminism was the prospect of emancipation from domesticity into wage labor outside the home. The allure of an "escape" from the home into wage labor did not truck with Black women writ large, because many of them had already been working, before wages during slavery, and for inequitable pay afterward. The domestic sphere itself was a site of labor for Black women, as well, as they went to work to relieve White men and women of drudgery in their own middle-class households. Rewarding McDaniel for performing in fiction a job she'd escaped in real life perversely places her back in the uniform of her oppression. With few exceptions, in roles performed by Dorothy Dandridge and Eartha Kitt, Mammy roles were the brightest stars that Black female actors could expect to see in their skies.

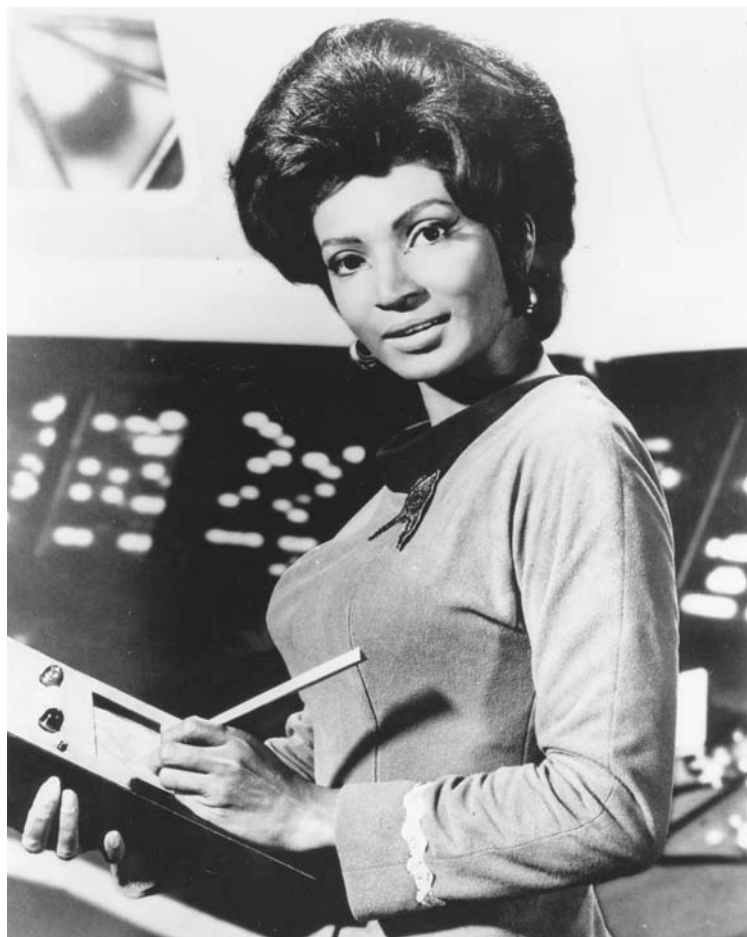
Print science fiction established domestic labor as a niche for women of color, as well. Tom Godwin's much-remembered short story "The Cold Equations" features not one woman, as treatments of its plot often note, but two. The story is frequently cited for its portrayal of the sacrifice of a young woman whose plan to stow away to the moon ends horribly. The ship only carries fuel enough for a specific quantity of mass, making it impossible for the ship to reach its destination with all the crew members aboard, and after some frenzied hand-wringing, the men decide to jettison the young woman into space. Critics have noted that the story exploits the notion that women are extraneous to science and industry, but at the

same time, it further reinscribes a division of labor specific to women of color through its overlooked traffic in racialized gender roles. There was another woman in “The Cold Equations”: a “Gelanese native girl” whom the tragic heroine meets as she is cleaning up in the supply room. By distinguishing the fictionalized background of the cleaning woman (native girl) from her unmarked (read White) counterpart in terms of their respective relationships to space, Godwin’s language reiterates a spatial frame of reference grounded in histories of settler colonialism and stereotypes. DeWitt Kilgore notes how other writers, like Ben Bova, have attempted to reconstruct the race thinking embedded in SF narratives of space exploration.⁵ In light of these considerations, it is significant to note that Godwin’s story launched casual attitudes toward women’s lives into space through multiple, related renditions of female vulnerability: tragic exclusion, for the young woman who is ejected into space, and banal exploitation, for the girl whose native background reiterates a racialized and gendered notion of class and domesticity even in the course of an imaginative flight into fantasy.⁶

While her role as Uhura may have spared Nichols the hazards of actually becoming or being typecast as a domestic worker, making *Star Trek* all the more fantastic, her working conditions on the series bowed to racial and sexual norms. As a necessary ingredient in *Trek*’s utopian formula, Nichols was reminded of her marginal but essential function on a daily basis. Roddenberry had realized a role for Nichols only after the network’s approval of the second series pilot. The studio had rejected one woman in a command role, Majel Barrett as Number One, and Barrett was demoted to the role of Nurse Christine Chapel.⁷ On the bridge, Nichols was slated to replace a Black male actor, Lloyd Haynes, as communications officer.⁸ Desilu studios refused to approve a contract for her, however. Nichols explains that she had received verbal assurances that her position would be permanent, citing actors’ union rules, and she recounts disbelief upon finding out that she would be a day player—called on and compensated only according to daily filming requirements rather than contracted for the duration of the season. While placing her on a daily shooting schedule rather than a seasonal or multiyear contract led to greater take-home compensation, it undermined the claim she could make to ownership of her role in the fictional universe of *Trek*.⁹ Unlike other actors who portrayed members of the bridge crew, her role in the production of the text was not legible in terms of its material significance, except when she was literally present on the set. Continuity, in the form of their contracts, between the other actors and their characters affirmed the twin utopian projects

represented by the cast of *Star Trek* and the crew of the *Enterprise*, respectively. Meanwhile, as a day player, Nichols seemed to perform utopian acts one by one. When she left the set after shooting her scenes, she had no explicit assurance that her job, or Uhura's, would be waiting for her when she came back.

In her memoir *Beyond Uhura*, Nichols articulates her protest against the circumstances of her role emphatically within the vocabulary of *Star*



Nichelle Nichols: NASA recruiter, in costume as Lieutenant Uhura of television's *Star Trek* in 1977. Nichols lent her celebrity to recruiting efforts for NASA that enlisted history-making astronauts, including Sally Ride, Guion Bluford, Judith Resnik, and Ronald McNair. From the Great Images in NASA collection.

Trek: “‘But it’s not a new contract,’ I argued logically.”¹⁰ Logic is the watchword of *Trek*’s fictional Vulcan characters, as Leonard Nimoy’s performance as Mr. Spock reminds the cast and audience in virtually every episode. Vulcans are loath to display emotion and incapable of insincerity, because logic is the highest value of the shared culture that *Trek* imagines for them. By appropriating a privileged rhetorical strategy from within the text of *Trek*, Nichols makes her argument about her role as Uhura appear consistent with its genre context. It is notable that Nichols maintained a cool head in a fight for her job, given the stereotypical portrayal of Black women’s anger as irrational and excessive. Moreover, she situates the understated rebellion in which she engaged at the time in terms that are consistent with *Star Trek*’s utopian rhetoric rather than a distraction from it. By showing how she, as a Black woman, could behave like Spock, a Vulcan, she uses the traits that characterize a nonhuman to humanize herself.

Uhura and Spock shared another affinity that blurred the lines between fantasy and reality in Nichols’s life, even as it reinforced the distinction for Leonard Nimoy: they were the first actors on set every day and among the last to leave. Because she was frequently the only woman seen on the bridge set alongside the other principals, Nichols required elaborate makeup to emphasize her feminine presence. Only Spock’s pointed ears and stylized “alien” features involved more attention.¹¹ Makeup artists accustomed to working primarily with White men and women were hardly prepared to present Nichols’s face for the cameras at all, and unlike the walk-on actors who lent flashes of color to the series in one shot at a time, she had to be visible early and often in each episode. In addition, because of her position on the set, at the communications console that placed her behind the captain and other command crew, Nichols would have to appear in shots of the bridge from many different perspectives. She recalls, “Whenever an assistant director remarked, ‘Stick around Nichelle. We may need you for Bill’s [Shatner’s] close-up,’ I felt like the scullery maid.”¹² To promise Black women’s future liberation from limited, degrading roles in the future, Nichols had to perform their continued subordination in the present. Even though she had a paucity of lines, and she longed to “beam down” to new worlds on “away-team missions” with Shatner, Nimoy, and DeForest Kelley as Doctor McCoy, Nichols was overworked in the aforementioned ways primarily because she was indispensable to the image of the bridge crew. In light of the possibility for exterior adventures, the confinement of Nichols’s character to the bridge relegated her

diversifying function to a “domestic” sphere, leaving her “home” while adventures “away” remained the province of the series’s male leads.

Although Uhura’s proverbial home was a space of confinement, performing the construction of a domestic space that belonged to the character provided Nichelle Nichols with a measure of agency. We can consult a few images of Uhura’s interior life from the scenes that take place in the lieutenant’s quarters in season 3 of the original series. A *mélange* of signs for African heritage color our perception of Uhura in her intimate space: she’s tossed her Starfleet uniform onto a bedspread featuring a zebra-skin print, we see her putting on outsized jewelry, there’s furniture with an antelope motif, and an assemblage of sculptures are on display. If we weren’t interested in imagining an interior life for this character, and we wanted to use this set as evidence to explain away her agency, we would be appalled at how casually *Star Trek* appropriates racialized imagery to make Uhura look “African.” We could look at Nichelle Nichols in relation to these generic props as evidence of the way White and Black Americans alike have used primitivism to avoid paying attention to distinct African cultures and traditions. We could even read such incognizant acts of cultural appropriation as endemic to science fiction, in which a woman like Uhura appears just as rare and exotic as an alien compared to the predominantly White faces that populate the genre’s visual landscape.



The stylized interior of Lieutenant Uhura’s quarters depicted in *Star Trek*, season 3, episode 9, “The Tholian Web.” Copyright Paramount Pictures.

However, reading the set strictly in terms of its historical precedents consigns Uhura to the task of reproducing normative discourses on race, space, and gender. Instead of removing the actor from the *mise-en-scène* and reinscribing her character's silence, we might emphasize performance in a way that considers the role that Nichelle Nichols herself plays in constructing the meaning of the set. By situating the appearance of Uhura's quarters as evidence of Nichelle Nichols's own interest in moving beyond the conventions of the twentieth-century television industry and the primitivism that underlies representations of people of African descent in popular media, we might consider how these images buttress the arguments Black feminist scholars have made for the value of Black women's performative construction of private space.

Elizabeth Alexander, in *The Black Interior*, and Phillip Brian Harper, in *Private Affairs*, reappraise the notion of privacy in American culture by considering how identity, property, and space have come together in ways that show how the concept hinges on social conditions rather than individualistic questions alone. Reconsidering privacy as part of a collective articulation of socially constructed boundaries rather than an individual exercise of power is particularly valuable for women, sexual minorities, and people of color. Alexander points out that for many Black Americans, the home is readily available to inspection as a space of representation, insofar as the display of precious objects such as family photos and memorabilia in spaces that guests can see signifies class and cultural propriety in ways that anticipate a discerning public. Preparing the home for display is also a way of working through a history in which discriminating viewers have relied on access to individual Black homes to pathologize Black communities. Harper likewise explores how socially marginalized subjects participate in publicity through modes of literature, expressive culture, and everyday life, including efforts to name and thereby dislodge social stigma from sexual practices and intervene in the conventions of publication in genres like confessional poetry, which are presumptively grounded in privacy. If the meaning of Uhura's Blackness encompasses a distinctively racialized and gendered performative construction of private space, perhaps her collection of art objects with Africanist motifs coheres according to a cultural politics that eschews any aspiration toward appearing authentically "African" before the viewing public.

The textual evidence that depicts Nichols's character as ambiguously African includes a scene from an early episode of the original series in which a tall, dark, and handsome man attempts to seduce Uhura by

speaking to her in Swahili. Uhura's last name is a corruption of the Bantu word *uhuru*, meaning "freedom," "independence," or "liberation," and her apocryphal first name, Nyota, is a Swahili word for "star," but her first name is never used on-screen in the original *Star Trek*. Uhura's first name is seen and heard in various later iterations of the series, including tie-in novels and the recent films in which actor Zoe Saldana reprises the role. Whether it was her decision or not, the choice to cast Nichelle Nichols as a character with a Swahili name, like the choice to decorate her quarters with an amalgam of Africanist motifs, marks Uhura's performance of cultural specificity as part of an *elective* identification. The signs of her African identity are direct appropriations of the Black nationalist aesthetics evoked by cultural interventions contemporaneous with *Star Trek*, such as the Black Arts movement. The thick ambiguity of Uhura's proverbial African background is subjective, but not arbitrary.

Feminist criticism allows us to think deeply about affinity with the essentialist discourse of the Black aesthetic that her character's self-fashioning implies. Madhu Dubey makes a laudable argument to this effect with respect to writers such as Alice Childress, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Gayl Jones in *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Dubey notes that these authors use formal structures as well as rhetorical modes such as parody and deferral to confront the gender ideology of dominant representations of Blackness. Whereas Black nationalisms converge on visions of history and identity that tend toward patriarchy, in the view of critics such as Madhu Dubey and Michelle Wright, Black feminist, lesbian, and womanist critical thought tends to articulate their subjectivity in dialogic terms. Rather than laying claim to a subject position that is simply "not White" and "not male," dialogic modes of subject formation allow Black women writers to move beyond *negation* as a political strategy that starts and ends on the terms dictated by normative discourse to maintain open-ended possibilities instead. One of the objectives of such a strategy is installing performances of Black womanhood that resist stereotypes in the popular imagination, such as Beneatha in Lorraine Hansberry's play *Raisin in the Sun* and the title character of Alice Walker's novel *Meridian*. If we conceptualize Uhura as the intellectual property of the corporations that own her likeness, there is no room for an open-ended interpretation of her style of dress, use of language, or spatial practices. Such a reading is possible if we view Nichelle Nichols as part of a tradition of Black women's self-fashioning. By staging that intervention into science fiction, Nichols expands the range of genres in which

audiences concerned with Black women's performance may look for examples in that tradition.

Domestic space and the space of work were virtually always collapsed under the service of a racialized, gendered division of labor wherever Black women appeared on-screen before Uhura. Without a notion of Black women's performance as a discrete category of cultural production, *Star Trek* would provide only negative examples for Black feminist studies on television and film. Without a positive function (that is, an addition to the text rather than an absence from it) in the series as a Black woman, Uhura appears simply to facilitate the actions of other characters—to be a plot device—rather than fulfilling any discrete role of her own. The status of Uhura's presence in *Star Trek* as performative response to a lacuna in the tradition of utopia, a gap in its textual record, is best emphasized by a line she speaks in the episode "The Naked Time." When an interstellar virus strips crew members on the *Enterprise* of their psychological inhibitions (causing Spock to show emotion, for instance), George Takei's character Mr. Sulu imagines himself as a swashbuckling hero rather than a docile, self-effacing navigator. Fencing sword in hand, Sulu takes Uhura forcefully about the waist and proclaims, "I'll save you, fair maiden!" It is crucial that Takei is acting out of character in this scene, expressing a palpable wish that an Asian American actor could achieve the stardom identified with Captain Kirk's swaggering masculinity. Uhura dispels this fantasy, however. She reminds viewers of Takei's distinctive role and her own with the retort, "Sorry, neither!"

Nichols's disidentification with the appellation "fair maiden," and her resistance to being saved by Sulu's suddenly empowered masculinity, marks a profoundly self-aware moment in the text with respect to the way it represents Uhura as a Black woman. Sulu's misplaced sense of heroism is also a moment of misrecognition, and it is crucial for a Black woman actor to perform the disidentification that makes Uhura's subject position as neither "fair" nor a "maiden" legible. Under chattel slavery, Black women were routinely coerced into sexual acts and childbearing, and they were legally unable to refuse consent or to enter into contracts on their own behalf; the latter made them ineligible for marriage. This meant that whether she was a virgin or not, a Black woman could not be a "maiden." Whereas White women's vulnerability to masculine power reinforced their femininity and made their protection a social priority, Blackness and female vulnerability together signified Black women's availability to exploitation and violence. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw made a landmark

intervention in the field of critical race feminism by articulating how this historical legacy leaves Black women disproportionately vulnerable to violence and less able to pursue legal redress.¹³ For the purposes of *Star Trek*, staging a future moment in which a Black woman remains aware of her potential vulnerability while asserting a self-protective rather than disempowering meaning for it is a utopian gesture.

As Hortense Spillers and others have argued, attention to the ways in which both conventional and progressive discourses of sexuality elide Black women reveals how “sexuality, as a term of empowerment, belongs to the empowered.”¹⁴ By refusing Sulu’s claim to empowerment, Uhura announces herself as a subject who does not offer her subordination as a basis for men’s empowerment through sexuality. If Black womanhood in *Star Trek* means what it has historically meant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Uhura could be conscripted into anyone’s sexual fantasies. Sulu’s uncharacteristic act of chivalry tries to initiate such a scene. Yet, by staging her refusal, the writers remind the viewer that Sulu is acting out a fantasy about his own empowerment when he enacts an entitled, commanding form of masculine sexuality; it is only because he sees himself in different terms that he sees Uhura in different terms. Nichols, remaining in character, removes Uhura from a position that would empower others at her expense, reinforcing the characters’ existing relationships by reasserting the meaning of her own identity among her peers. In the context of this episode, it is crucial for Uhura to remain grounded to save the *Enterprise* crew from themselves, and reinforcing Black womanhood as a defining quality that Nichols brings to the role helps restore the text’s coherence.

The memorable *Star Trek* episode “Plato’s Stepchildren” belies the dilemma of Uhura’s sexual agency as a Black woman in another fashion; this time, she participates in a sexualized act that is obviously taking place against her will, and she thereby indicates she has a will of her own. The episode’s most sensational moment features a kiss between William Shatner and Nichelle Nichols, the second interracial kiss on television and the first in a narrative drama.¹⁵ The conceit of the “Plato’s Stepchildren” episode is the capture of *Enterprise* crew members by beings called the Platonians. The Platonians have the ability to manipulate the minds and bodies of others, and they use this power for their own personal entertainment. As Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhura approach one another under mind control and the Platonians look on with lurid excitement, the taboo status of the ensuing kiss dominates the scene from the audience’s

point of view. In the viewing audience, we are positioned like the Platonians, watching actors fulfill a forbidden desire for our pleasure.

Nichols's Black womanhood makes her participation in the kiss scene unconventional with respect to the conventions of heterosexual romance on television. Racial difference in sex scenes often stirs up connotations of violence and coercion that must either be sensationalized or repressed, because control over Black sexuality has been an instrument of racial subordination historically. In her memoir, Nichols seems to dislodge the interracial kiss from its significance as the marker of the episode's utopian quality; instead, she offers an interpretation of the violence at work that inscribes "Plato's Stepchildren" into a more radical form of spectatorship. Invoking the genre-specific device of mind control that drives the story, Nichols draws attention to what she calls the "combination of sex and humiliation" the kiss represents. Her reading is particularly attentive to the role of humiliation in Kirk and Uhura's situation, whereas critical appraisals of *Star Trek* as a utopian narrative conspicuously avoid that aspect of this pivotal performance.

After they kiss at the command of the Platonians, Captain Kirk can be seen and heard cracking a bullwhip near a quivering Uhura, while Spock approaches Nurse Chapel with a branding iron. The Platonians appear "titillated at the proceedings." As closeup shots of the Platonians show their haughty delight, the sound of the whip can be heard over Doctor McCoy's desperate protests; we also hear the whip as we see Uhura's fear-stricken face, shifting the viewer's identification in the scene from the Platonians, played by White men and women in classical dress, to their victim, a Black woman removed from the Starfleet uniform that identifies her with a form of agency and turned into a sexual object. With wry understatement, in her book, Nichelle Nichols describes the form of pleasure offered by the episode as "an early foray into S&M" rather than primarily a reference to slavery, interracial romance, or violence against women. The pleasure in this spectacle belongs to the Platonians and the television audience as voyeurs, and neither of the parties to the interracial kiss is the focus of this power dynamic.

The description of this scene as a "foray into S&M" that Nichols invokes is critical, because in these terms, the relation between sexual excitement and physical violence in the scene is one of continuity rather than contrast. The scene exploits fetishistic sexuality and interracial sexuality alike by invoking them for the audience's pleasure. At first glance, it appears to compare consensual interracial sexuality to racist sexual violence and

forms of fetishism that are coded as perverse, but it is important to recall that the relations depicted in the scene are entirely nonconsensual—Kirk and Uhura are made into objects of voyeurism against their will. Under mind control, both characters are vulnerable, to varying degrees, but Captain Kirk becomes an avatar through whom his powerful captors can indulge in violence against Uhura.

The juxtaposition between voyeurism, public erotic acts, pain, and interracial sexuality in this scene calls to mind the political dimensions of how outré sexual practices are framed for the public. Scholars suggest that we interrogate these spectacles in terms of the material power relations that they bring to light, including fundamental issues of consent, bodily autonomy, exploitation, trauma histories, and the function of commodities in sexual practice. Anthropologist Margot Weiss, in her recent book *Techniques of Pleasure*, pursues these vital considerations through ethnographic studies of contemporary BDSM communities. I would suggest that if the interracial kiss in *Star Trek* has a place in investigations of sexuality in popular media, those studies must foreground considerations of the racial politics of fetishism and BDSM, because these are the techniques through which interracial sexuality takes place in the scene. By recasting her memory of the scene with attention to its more outré aspects, rather than the sensational kiss, and referencing consensual sexual practices rather than rape as the techniques mobilized by the performance, Nichols reclaims her capacity to define Uhura as a character.

An Illogical Woman

If the long-lived fandom of *Star Trek* has shown us anything, it is that limitations on the meaning of a performance are negotiable. *Trek* would not have inspired the utopian practices of media fandom if its vision were limited to the intentions of Gene Roddenberry and William Shatner. Just as the social relations and desires of fans reshape the meanings of the material they work with, however, exchanges among actors and other participants in a performance shape the meanings presented to its audience. The traces of revision and interpretation among “producers” are always there for “consumers” to continue the process. For Nichelle Nichols, this process of revision was frequently one sided, as her lines were cut in one script after another. Occasionally, the additional depth she desired for her character could break through. In an episode filmed for the first season of *Star Trek*, “The Man Trap,” Uhura approaches Spock listlessly while he’s

seated in the captain's chair, and as he reviews her communications logs, she sighs, "Mr. Spock, sometimes I think if I hear that word *frequency* once more, I'll cry." Nichols writes that the line was "repeated often enough to Gene to warrant being memorialized in this scene."¹⁶ Spock puzzles, "Since it is illogical for a communications officer to resent the word frequency, I have no answer," but she pleads with him to start a conversation:

UHURA: No, you have an answer. I'm an illogical woman—who's beginning to feel too much a part of that communications console. Why don't you tell me I'm an attractive young lady, or ask me if I've ever been in love? Tell me how your planet Vulcan looks on a lazy evening when the moon is full.

SPOCK: Vulcan has no moon, Miss Uhura.

UHURA: I'm not surprised, Mr. Spock.¹⁷

Nichols resignifies her calling card, the word "frequency," to remind herself—and the audience—that she and her character have qualities, including conventionally feminine attributes, beyond the role of the communications officer. Her signature phrase had usually served to reiterate her marginal position. In candid interviews, Nichols railed against repeated cuts to her lines: "I mean I just decided that I don't even need to read the FUCKING SCRIPT! I mean I know how to say, 'hailing frequencies open.'"¹⁸

Poetically, the very phrase that reiterated her marginal status on *Star Trek* would commemorate Nichelle Nichols's performance once a human voice actually spoke it from a spacecraft in orbit. Astronaut Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space, repeated the line at the start of every shift when she flew as mission specialist on the space shuttle *Endeavor*. Constance Penley recognizes Jemison's achievements in her book *NASA/Trek*, and the rhetoric through which she does so opens the door to a deeper analysis of NASA's utopian agenda:

Take Mae Jemison, for example, the doctor-astronaut who flew on the 1992 *Endeavor* voyage and the first African-American woman in space. Her list of accomplishments is astonishing: she studied chemical engineering and African and Afro-American studies at Stanford, then went on to medical school at Cornell. After receiving her medical degree in 1981, she became a Peace Corps medical officer for Sierra Leone and Liberia. She was working as a general practitioner and attending graduate engineering courses in Los Angeles when NASA tapped her in 1987. She is fluent in six languages and is an artist. At the time she was recruited, she was the only African-American woman among NASA's 92 astronauts. It looks as if NASA is limiting

the involvement of women—especially minority women—in the astronaut corps by making them demonstrate markedly more qualifications than male candidates.¹⁹

The story of how a woman who vocally identified herself with *Star Trek*'s Nichelle Nichols became the face of a new generation of astronauts is worth recounting. Penley's analysis cites Mae Jemison as a representative of the impossibly high standards to which women were held in an institution that propagated images of popular science, but she makes startlingly little use of the seemingly natural continuity that Nichelle Nichols's career demonstrates between the legacy of NASA and that of *Star Trek*. Instead, the exploration of gender and sexual politics that *NASA/Trek* undertakes prioritizes a dilemma particular to White women, eschewing the way in which even the lamentable casualties she documents benefit from a critical analysis of feminism and science fiction grounded in the experience of people of color—an experience typified by Nichelle Nichols's pursuit of utopia.

Women in Motion

The centerpiece of Penley's *NASA/Trek* is the harrowing memory of the space shuttle *Challenger*'s explosion in 1986. The moment was seared into the psyche of millions of Americans who were watching and who experienced the events as a traumatic blow to their faith in space exploration as, among other things, a revelation of their faltering national commitment to “popular science.” Penley's adamant criticism of NASA's “teacher in space” program insightfully illustrates how halfhearted lip service from professionals in science and industry about respecting diversity actually propagates bias against women. The death of civilian astronaut Christa McAuliffe aboard the *Challenger* brought the “teacher in space” narrative to a spectacular end. It seemed to indicate that women were tragically simply incapable of participating in high-minded efforts such as space flight. After McAuliffe's death, Penley recounts, the public retreated into coping mechanisms that reinforced their existing worldviews, including a distrust of NASA along with other government agencies and a troubling tendency to deride women through macabre jokes about McAuliffe.

The popular intervention in which Penley observes a grain of resistance to the repressive trend in popular science discourse is *Star Trek* fandom. By working through the complex feelings that *Star Trek* provoked in

creative writing, fans reshaped popular culture in the same the way Penley described her scholarship as part of an effort to “rewrite NASA itself”²⁰ through criticism and advocacy. Fan fiction provides a viable alternative to “manned” space flight (i.e., costly and dangerous shuttle missions whose personnel are disproportionately male) for fans of *Trek*, enabling them to enjoy the utopian possibilities of space travel with lower risk and greater symbolic reward. For example, Penley notes, *Star Trek* fan fiction is well known for experimenting with questions of sexuality in space that NASA bashfully refused to acknowledge even as they encountered the practical issues of bringing women and men together on shuttle missions.²¹ Experience sharing their feelings with their peers had also provided those fans attentive to developments in the U.S. space program with practice in coping with failures like the *Challenger* disaster; symbolic losses, like the end of *Star Trek* on television and the poor reception of their own works by the cultural mainstream, prepared them to confront the potential impact of McAuliffe’s death for popular science.

Nichelle Nichols steps into the utopian scenario at the intersection of NASA and *Trek* fandom through a peculiar example in Penley’s study. While discussing how *Trek* fans cope with the *Challenger* incident, Penley cites a work of fan fiction that attempts to process the disaster by imagining Nichols in the position of the late Christa McAuliffe:

The author rewrote NASA’s choice of Christa McAuliffe to be the first civilian in space by having NASA instead select actor Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura) to go up on the *Challenger*; in appreciation of her work for the space agency recruiting women and minority astronaut candidates. Perhaps the writer felt that Nichols’ death would make more sense given her greater length of involvement with NASA, her superior professionalism, and her noncivilian status, at least in her role as the *Enterprise* communications officer.²²

In some respects, a woman like Nichelle Nichols seemed to embody the hopes many other people who never expected to participate in space travel themselves had invested in the initiative to send an everyday American aboard the shuttle. As a Black woman, however, she represents a problematic surrogate for Christa McAuliffe. Penley’s well-grounded critique of the teacher in space program in *NASA/Trek* excoriates the ideology of “representative mediocrity”²³ that was used to select McAuliffe. Citing McAuliffe’s unflattering but relevant lack of math, science, and athletics skills alongside the knowledge and endurance demonstrated by all the other astronauts, irrespective of gender, Penley notes that installing McAuliffe as the

representative of an average woman in space was insulting to female astronauts and potential astronauts. Casting Nichols in McAuliffe's position replaces mediocrity with a record of "superior professionalism." If NASA had recruited a more capable civilian and set a more inspiring example for women in space, one that science fiction fans and NASA supporters could recognize as part of a tradition of excellence in both areas of popular culture, they might have maintained an argument for utopia amid the tragedy. However, the symbolic sacrifice of Nichelle Nichols in the fan writer's scenario reinscribes the notion that Black women's bodies are more expendable than those of White women. Paradoxically, the ostensibly positive qualities that Nichols's persona stands for—superior professionalism, a demonstrated aptitude for work—make her less valuable, whereas the very qualities to which Penley points to recognize McAuliffe as mediocre entitle her to protection from harm.

In fact, Nichelle Nichols's involvement with NASA did outline an alternative utopian praxis that would have avoided McAuliffe's death, but she didn't offer up her own body to the effort—perhaps because it never occurred to her that she should represent women in space in real life. After developing friendships with NASA administrators who attended *Star Trek* fan conventions, Nichols became accustomed to discussing the agency's lagging public enthusiasm with them. Her celebrity status and concern for science made her a natural choice to lead a public relations effort that would expand NASA's recruiting efforts and promote science education throughout the United States. Nichols's consulting firm, Women in Motion, went to work in 1977. With the advent of the reusable space shuttle, NASA would move away from its previous reliance on (predominantly male) aircraft test pilots to involve "a new kind of astronaut, a scientist astronaut," in the foreseeable future. The new division of labor in space would prioritize scientific achievement and intellectual versatility rather than the technical skills specific to the male-dominated military ventures of the past. Nichols's involvement was one of the first signs that everyday life in the space age would grow to reflect the utopian precedent set by *Star Trek*.

My efforts to recover the final report authored by Nichols and her peers came to naught. In the course of researching this chapter, I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to NASA that resulted in an admirable search by employees at the agency's facilities. I am grateful for their efforts, but no record of the consulting firm's report emerged. Nichols's own recollections remain the best source on the topic. In *Beyond Uhura*, Nichols articulates her view that diversity and quality would have to be

twin goals in the effort to recruit new astronauts. She insists, “I don’t want anyone to think for one second that someone unqualified only got here through ‘affirmative action.’ I don’t want a token woman sitting by the door here.”²⁴ The Women in Motion effort was enormously popular, garnering applications in large numbers:

In the seven months before Women in Motion, Inc. began, NASA had received only 1,600 applications, including fewer than 100 from women and 35 from minority candidates. Of these, NASA told me, none of the women or minority applicants qualified. By the end of June 1977, just four months after we assumed our task, 8,400 applications were in, including 1,649 from women (a fifteen-fold increase) and an astounding 1,000 from minorities. . . . Among these applications were many names destined for history, including Sally Ride, the first American woman to go into space, and Fred Gregory and Guy Bluford, two of the first African-American astronauts.²⁵



Nichelle Nichols, center, with NASA administrator James Fletcher; Gene Roddenberry, creator of television’s *Star Trek*; and cast members DeForest Kelley, George Takei, James Doohan, Leonard Nimoy, and Walter Koenig, in front of the *Enterprise* space shuttle in 1976. From the Great Images in NASA collection.

Also among the recruits in the era while Nichols was affiliated with NASA were Ellison Onizuka, Judith Resnick, and Ronald McNair, three of the astronauts who died aboard the *Challenger*. Penley notes a reference to the Japanese American Onizuka that occurs in the 1980s sequel to *Star Trek*,²⁶ but she does not mention the parallel between his status as the first Asian American astronaut and Japanese American actor George Takei's groundbreaking role in *Star Trek*. She says nothing regarding the significance of McNair's death, even though he would subsequently have a scholarship program named after him to encourage higher education for minorities. The omission is striking, considering that popular science is the topic of *NASA/Trek*. These intersections between NASA and *Star Trek* faded from view, it seems, because Penley was pursuing a critique of the gender ideology that marginalizes women such as Christa McAuliffe, that of representative mediocrity, rather than the discourse we might call "representative marginality," an analysis of which might account for the complex intervention in utopia performed by Onizuka, McNair, and Mae Jemison. Whereas promoting the image of ordinary White women in space signified a trade-off between qualifications and inclusiveness on NASA's part, the utopian ideal of meritocracy with which Nichelle Nichols approached the task of recruiting astronauts among people of color, including women of color such as Mae Jemison, represented the margins of society as reservoirs of talent rather than recapitulating the notion that dominant groups who are overrepresented in elite positions, as White men had been in the space program, were necessarily more talented than their minority counterparts.

Regarding Jemison's decision to distance herself from NASA after the *Challenger* debacle, Penley wrote, "She, too, had been such an important symbol to them . . . a major player in NASA's effort to look inclusive, to be *popular*."²⁷ Jemison, like other Black women who are called on to surmount multiple systems of oppression to put a face on utopian discourse, is a figure suspended between the status of marginal and popular. The fact that an "effort to look inclusive" was tantamount to an effort "to be popular" in the space age had a great deal to do with the example set in popular culture, such as in *Star Trek*, to portray cooperative, supremely competent Black womanhood as part of a desirable future. "Popular" in this sense recalls the usage cited by Stuart Hall: a popular cultural phenomenon has its roots among the masses of the people. The popular is thus a category that refers to the relations of mediation involved in a cultural phenomenon as well as the scope of its dissemination; *Star Trek* and

NASA attained popular status through the breadth of their visibility, but the efforts of Nichelle Nichols and Mae Jemison in particular constitute popular interventions because of their intense relevance to an identifiable segment of the public. This differential meaning of “popular” helps explain how popular phenomena showcase the contradictions of utopian discourse. If Mae Jemison could be a uniquely important symbol to NASA because of her Black womanhood and superior qualifications, while Christa McAuliffe had been an important symbol precisely because of the *lack* of qualifications associated with her identity, it is at the very least reasonable to conclude that the agency’s efforts to cultivate its public image with women and through them suffered from deeper cultural ambivalence regarding who women are and what their work makes possible.

The two varieties of popular science that placed improbable recruits aboard the *Challenger* in January 1986 (Onizuka, Resnick, and McNair, from the Women in Motion drive, and McAuliffe, via the teacher in space agenda) were fundamentally in conflict. Ultimately, the same failures of imagination under which NASA propagated the myth of a nonscientist White woman’s “representative mediocrity” undermined the hopes invested in the space age across the board by cutting corners on the shuttle program; Penley and Nichols agree about the causes of the disaster in their respective reflections on the *Challenger* incident. Technical shortcuts had prioritized the “popular” appeal of cost-effectiveness (to some stakeholders) over the expensive, difficult, and unremarkable work that would have satisfied a less visible but practically important constituency primarily concerned with astronauts’ safety. In an effort to meet one “popular” goal—facing pressure from the public and their representatives to save money—the agency gave short shrift to the means by which it might fulfill the utopian aim of representing American diversity in the space program.

Nichelle Nichols’s language regarding her recruitment efforts is telling; by discounting the notion that observers might ascribe the diversification of the astronaut program to “affirmative action,” she appears to play into the notion that deliberate efforts to recruit women and people of color undermine the quality of scientific and technological work. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout her career, she contradicted misconceptions about women and people of color by projecting their success into the future. When Nichols was in a position to empower others, the representatives of diversity she employed were also representatives of extraordinary talent. Still, owing to the compromises necessitated by the

limited imaginations of the twentieth century, some of her own performances and some of the bright stars following her never fulfilled their potential. Now, *Star Trek* has returned, but the space shuttle is a thing of the past. Whatever utopian vision determines the vehicle and the mission for the next stage of human space flight, I recommend that we think about the ways we might envision Nyota Uhura as the voice and the listening ear of our race as an opportunity to look forward to, as a document of our possibilities, rather than as a document of our limitations.

3

THE IMMORTAL STORM

Permutations of Race in Marvel Comics

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF UTOPIA IN SCIENCE FICTION fan culture became concrete to me as I navigated the floor of the Silver Spring Armory at age thirteen. It was the bimonthly regional comics convention, and I was looking for back issues at discounted prices. At the time, I was cultivating a taste for science fiction as a largely passive consumer of the genre on television. But comics fandom proved a much more rewarding environment for fans willing to work a bit harder. At the time, I was looking for two sets of comics, some current, some older: recent issues of titles from the Black-owned independent publisher Milestone Media (which I discuss later in this volume) and Marvel's *Classic X-Men*. Once, I thought the former were the only influential representations of Blackness in comics in my collection, but now, I am more aware of the precedent set by the latter. The *X-Men* comics that I sought out formed a critically acclaimed story arc depicting the transformation of the mutant superhero Jean Grey into a monstrous and ultimately tragic figure inspired by myth. By the time I read these comics, years had already passed since their original publication in the 1970s. The Phoenix saga has since formed the basis for a blockbuster film (*X-Men: The Last Stand*, 2006), and the original comics and their sequels have been reprinted in trade paperbacks that represent them as chapters of a single text. Upon reflection, these comics also read as chapters in the long-unfolding saga of encounters between manifestations of human difference imagined by speculative fiction—including mutant superpowers and advanced technologies—and their lived and historical counterparts: race, nation, gender, and subculture.

In addition to the story of the Phoenix, a legendary bird that rises from the ashes after it is consumed by fire, the texts that form the basis for this

chapter also invoke questions of power, difference, and human nature through another myth. In conjunction with the hypothetical considerations sustained by their paraliterary genre context, the X-Men comics offer a revisionist interpretation of popular images of Black womanhood through the character named Storm. This revisionist strategy, I argue, aims to construct an account of Black womanhood amenable to the utopian ideals characteristic of SF works in the era. In later chapters of *Speculative Blackness*, I discuss how Black authors and audiences posit visions of the future germane to the political concerns of people of African descent. This chapter, conversely, explores how Storm's Black womanhood provides an avatar for the argument that speculative tropes for human difference, like mutation, might supersede questions of race, gender, and nation in SF texts and thereby rationalize treating these categories of analysis with less critical scrutiny. Ultimately, the story of Storm in the X-Men comics exemplifies the contradictory implications of fashioning the marginality of the SF genre within cultural production, signified through the "mutant" trope, into a lens through which to interpret lived conditions of marginalization.

Countermyth

Beginning in 1975, the *X-Men* comics sacrificed their original portrayal of teenage life with a twist—between adventures, the eponymous heroes were a group of gifted youngsters at a boarding school in suburban New York—to make room for a more cosmopolitan superhero iconography.¹ Performing racial inclusion by setting narratives on an international stage, as I have argued regarding genre television and will go on to discuss in later chapters, is a common gesture in Anglo/North American SF texts. A unique part of the new *X-Men* series's aesthetic, however, was the introduction of characters that would layer racial and national differences onto its discourse of subject formation, which was previously differentiated primarily by the fictionalized social dynamics engendered by the conceit of mutant superpowers. Whereas the text was originally an allegorical presentation of superhuman difference as a metaphor for lived states of social marginalization, with a utopian thrust that emphasized overcoming those differences, it became a staging ground for confrontations between existing social formations that were rendered even more complicated by their intersection with the further social differentiation the mutant trope represents. In other words, the original X-Men stories

replaced lived social differences structured by known categories like race with the imaginary difference between human and mutant; the newer stories amplified existing differences by splitting them into mutant and nonmutant varieties.

Thanks to a forty-year history in comic books and adaptations, Storm is the most recognizable Black superhero in American popular culture.² To some degree, the visibility of this character negates the unique value of Black women's performance: until very recently with portrayals by Halle Berry in a series of X-Men films (excepting the costumed play of fans), Storm's presence in popular culture has never pertained directly to the work of any living Black woman in the field of cultural production. Accordingly, the character represents Black women while negating the proposition that Black women's lived and historical experiences and ongoing creativity are the conditions of possibility for representations of Black women in media. As I have discussed in previous chapters, such a situation is not unusual for Black people in popular culture, and it is no less significant in this case. Yet throughout this chapter, I discuss moments that belie the character's origins in conditions of production where Black women are absent; at some moments, it becomes useful to interpret the story of Storm as a *negation* of the negations involved in constructing Black womanhood as a figment of the normative imagination.

Cultural criticism in the postmodern era has emphasized how difference, haunting, betrayal, and similar negative categories of identification often serve as routes to intelligibility in culture for minority subjects. The work of Michelle Wright, for instance, traces African American intellectual responses to Hegelian philosophy as a strategy of "upheaval" or *Aufhebung*: a negation of the negations through which White supremacy defines Blackness.³ Those negations become a source of meaning in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, for instance; the protagonists, Sula and Nel, share a doubly negative identification as neither White nor male that affirms their shared challenges. Furthermore, as Rey Chow and Crystal Parikh note, minority subjects must often distance themselves from the normative standards of belonging in the United States to make their distinct voices heard. As I argue again in the course of discussing comics with respect to literary and cultural postmodernisms in a later chapter, it seems like a fundamental fallacy to represent Black womanhood as a discursive placeholder for the negation of subjectivity—not White, not male—without appropriate deference to critical approaches that treat Black womanhood as an intrinsically valuable category whose meaning is constituted

by Black women themselves. This chapter takes Black feminist analyses of subject formation into account while acknowledging that the figure of Storm has been shaped primarily through SF traditions that are incognizant about them.

There is a conceptual affinity, at least, between the aforementioned approaches to subject formation that work through normative negations, on one hand, and approaches to cultural production that emphasize marginality as a condition of possibility for certain distinct cultural practices, on the other. Contemporary studies of literature and popular media, in particular, have rehabilitated marginal categories in the field of cultural production—such as science fiction and comics—by invoking terms like *utopia* and *political unconscious* to describe how so-called fantasizing composes a socially significant activity. To the extent that this study militates against the hypothesis that doing cultural work in a marginal genre is tantamount to identifying within an oppressed social formation, it is important for me to reiterate that I do not consider the characterization of Storm as an example of minoritarian practice in expressive culture. Rather, I observe that in the interest of certain normative ideals, utopian interventions in popular culture have sometimes renovated problematic stereotypes by envisioning them under conditions that promise to enrich the cultural lexicon with expanded possibilities for the meaning of marginalized identities. At the same time, these utopian strategies simultaneously relegate the critical questions these novel representations raise—precisely how to move from marginality to empowerment—to the realm of the impossible.

Staging freedom for marginalized subjects under conditions that are necessarily fictitious rather than historically evident, as the *X-Men* comics propose, involves shifting the settings of texts in ways that signal genre distinctions: invoking space, the future, as-yet unrealized scientific innovations, or counterfactual histories, for instance. I am inspired to follow these shifts, to see where they lead, by a comment from feminist critic Laura Mulvey, who speaks to some reasons for working through the conventions of the popular imagination: “It cannot be easy to move from oppression and its mythologies to resistance in history: a detour through a no-man’s land or threshold area of counter-myth and symbolisation is necessary.”⁴ The following analysis, as an exploration of what Black womanhood means to an SF text, treats the example of Storm as a felicitous convergence between some questions raised by Black feminist cultural criticism regarding the politics of representation and those that drive

inquiry into how genre structures the production and interpretation of popular culture. I do not pretend that the imagery associated with Storm resolves those questions, but I take the opportunity to raise them.

A Detour

Storm appeared alongside German, Japanese, Native American, Canadian, Irish, and Russian superheroes in *Giant Size X-Men* #1. The comic depicted the founder of the team, Professor Charles Xavier, recruiting the mutant Ororo Munroe in an isolated part of Kenya, where she was worshipped as a goddess for her power to control the weather. In the eyes of some readers, the extensive mapping of Storm's superpowers onto the physical appearance of a Black woman risks naturalizing her supernatural qualities. A tendency to presuppose an affinity between Blackness and nature—evocative of naturalism (rather than speculation) in literature, Mammy tropes regarding Black women's nurturing roles, and "earth mother" imagery associated with all women of color, and indigenous women in particular—would displace the character from the genre specificity of superhero comics, reinscribing the putative dynamic of alienation between speculative fiction and Blackness. Such a critique animates Anna Beatrice Scott's assessment of Storm:

Her body is drawn as a shapely soul sister, not a rippling super, bounding out of its skin with sheer possibility. When she begins to use her power, the drawings are almost lovingly rendered, perhaps as an ode to all the super badass Blaxploitation [*sic*] mommas that had ever existed. But her body is not drawn straining under its force. It is natural for her frame. She thinks herself a god, not a mutant. She is forced to accept her misrecognition of reality and materialize as a mutant. . . . Storm's lines in the panels in which she appears wrap her in the ordinariness of being a magical negress.⁵

In this appraisal, the racialized basis for her superpowers signals a failure to separate Storm from prior representations of the Black female body in visual media, leaving the boundaries between Blackness and speculative fiction intact.

The preceding reading presupposes what I have called the Whiteness of science fiction, in some respects. By distinguishing the category of "god," on one hand, from "mutant," on the other, it affords the fictionalized category of mutant a degree of priority in the interpretation of the text that renders the term *god* out of place. The notion of mutant as a

category of identification preferable to the racialized, naturalized term *god*, however, belies prior readings of *X-Men* that indicate how the mutant trope itself is loaded with racial connotations. The notion of mutants is a heavy-handed allegory in the *X-Men* comics for racial difference and, occasionally, sexuality; mutants struggle to integrate themselves into a world that hates and fears them. Through suspension of disbelief, we might imagine that if persons with superpowers existed in the context of contemporary American society, they would be stigmatized, exploited, and oppressed in the same ways that people of color have been. Through the same interpretive maneuver, however, we might instead conceptualize Storm's identification as a "god" as a token of the way a text in a contrived setting where superpowers are prevalent throughout the world might accommodate a variety of subject positions for people characterized by them, with some communities marking mutants as outcasts and others recognizing the difference this conceit makes in other, less marginalizing terms.

If we conceptualize superpowers as a global phenomenon, we might consider how groups of people who prefer and benefit from their imagined homogeneity—such as White Americans and Europeans—marginalize and devalue racial difference. Other, more heterogeneous groups—such as the hypothetical African peoples who designate Ororo as a deity—adapt to encounters with social difference through cosmological explanations, transculturation, transnationalism, solidarity, practices of initiation, and extended concepts of affiliation such as kinship, ancestry, and diplomacy. Storm's ascribed status as a goddess, in Scott's reading, cannot elude White supremacist limitations. While the misrecognition of Storm as a god rather than a mutant would negate the character's affinities with the rest of the X-Men, enlisting her as a god among mutants negates that negation, retaining the character's difference but shifting the sign under which it operates. Storm's inclusion in the text is a sign that radically different and more inclusive variations on the myth of "mutant" identity might become legible through continued struggle with the text.

The magical Negro, a cultural trope through which Scott characterizes Storm, denotes characters in popular fictional texts who defy typical human limitations but only use their "powers" to supplement the efforts of White protagonists.⁶ Toni Morrison prefigures this formulation with the notion of "American Africanism" in her seminal study of race in the literary imagination, *Playing in the Dark*, which criticized the way in which White American authors relied on representations of racial minorities who

possessed no motivations of their own. The magical Negro terminology has been applied to Black screen performance since Sidney Poitier was the only well-known Black actor in popular cinema, and it only sometimes emphasizes the more literal connotations of “magic.” Will Smith and Michael Clark Duncan, for instance, add supernatural elements to the otherwise mundane plots of *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000) and *The Green Mile* (1999), respectively, but Poitier’s only unbelievable turn in *The Defiant Ones* (1958) was an act of self-sacrifice. In the description by Scott, Storm represents a form of subjectivity that appears alien to everyone but herself, just as Blackness might be distorted as an inhuman, animalistic, or supernatural quality from a White supremacist point of view. Scott pointedly invokes the specifically animalistic rhetoric that denigrates Black women’s humanity by using the epithet magical “negress,” akin to lioness or tigress, and this interpretation of Storm’s characterization is not without precedent. Other comic book characters, such as the Black Panther who is depicted along with Storm in Marvel comics, and Vixen, depicted in DC comics, also have animal attributes. Whereas these tropes hazard portraying Blackness as more inhuman than superhuman, they provide a reminder of recurrent failures in literary and paraliterary texts to reconcile Blackness with humanity.⁷

In the issues of the X-Men comics that follow her initial introduction, the revisions and updates to her origin story make it possible to situate Storm in a context where frames of reference germane to characterizing Black women in popular culture and creating comic book superheroes overlap in meaningful ways. A nuanced reading of this overlap allows us to envision the categories of identification Storm represents (Black, female, human, and superhero) as mutually constitutive rather than fundamentally irreconcilable. This manner of interpretation is only possible, I argue, if we understand genre as a phenomenon relatively autonomous from the material forces of identity formation and therefore applicable to mediating a variety of lived conditions as well as fantastic possibilities conceived from multiple vantage points. As I discuss in a later chapter, this reading requires us to refrain from treating Storm’s Black womanhood as a collection of fixed meanings imported into speculative fiction from other texts; it encourages us to convince ourselves that Blackness might belong in superhero comics. To extend the chiasmic formulation through which I suggested relating Blackness and speculative fiction in the introduction, in a later chapter I address the question of whether superhero comics might belong to Blackness, as well.

A No-Man's-Land

It is important to assess how the image of Storm propagates myths about Black womanhood, but the efficacy of this myth making must be measured against the criteria of the counterdiscourse that Black women articulate through cultural production. Author and activist bell hooks calls for a differential notion of Black women's subjectivity, a "demand for transformation" rather than a single shared ideal, as an instrumental part of Black feminist criticism. In a discussion of her dialogue with a colleague regarding differences among Black women, she writes,

I was among black comrades who were engaged in a process of transformation. Collectively, we were working to problematize our notions of black female subjectivity. None of us assumed a fixed essential identity. It was so evident that we did not all share a common understanding of being black and female, even though some of our experiences were similar.⁸

In the following discussion of Storm's changing image, I argue that the character's multiple embodiments over time attest to the internal differentiation within each of the distinct identity formations she represents: Black, female, Black and female, superhero, Black superhero, female superhero, and Black female superhero.⁹ The SF genre tradition has mediated each of these real and imagined subject positions differently over time. For Storm to embody all of them, the character would have to change over time, as well.

Like the other *X-Men* characters, susceptibility to transformation for the purposes of telling different kinds of stories is an intrinsic aspect of Storm. When writer Len Wein and artist Dave Cockrum re-created the X-Men in 1975, they had two ideas in mind for the character that would eventually coalesce into Storm. One design was a weather-controlling male hero of unspecified background who would be named Tempest. The other was a Black woman called the Black Cat. She could change into a cat. In fairness, it was a large, anthropomorphized cat. Her real name in this original version, uninspiringly, was "Tabby."¹⁰

Underwhelmed with the Black Cat's prospects and unable to conceive of a personality for Tempest, Wein and Cockrum combined the two characters in the persona of Storm. From the outset, the transformation of Tempest into Storm required the text's creators to reconfigure any relationship they originally had in mind between the race, gender, and superhuman qualities of the new character. While the Black female character

A drawing by Dave Cockrum, depicting a character named the Black Cat, which would eventually inform the design of the prominent Black female superhero Storm in Marvel Comics's *X-Men* series. This drawing was reprinted in issue #8 of *Back Issue* magazine in 2005. Copyright 2005, Marvel Characters, Inc. From the author's collection.



maintained most attributes of her physical appearance, her hair was converted from its initial style, which telegraphed her superpowers, to the flowing white locks that make Storm an exception to conventional markers of African and Black American ethnicity. In addition, the removal of “Black” from the character’s name set her apart from the lineage of Black superheroes and villains who announce their racial background in comics: Black Lightning, the Black Panther, and Black Manta, to name a few. Whereas the name “Tabitha” had linked the character’s mundane persona to its nonhuman aspect, renaming her Ororo (Swahili for “beauty”) separates Storm’s individual and national identity from her superpowers. In the process of moving the character from initial design to launch, the African element of Storm’s background reasserts her humanity, while her powers

link her to a superhero persona that was initially conceptualized as male and racially unmarked (read White). This set of transformations already involves a complex configuration of race, gender, and genre.

Every character in the superhero genre has an origin story that reveals the nature of his or her powers. The mutant heroes of *X-Men* modify this convention. Rather than receiving their special abilities under extraordinary circumstances, they were part of a subset of the population born with genetic mutations that begin to fully express themselves at adolescence. Superheroes are also identified by their weaknesses. Superman is vulnerable to Kryptonite, for example. Storm's superpowers are innate, like those of all mutants, but her vulnerability is not: she suffers from debilitating claustrophobia because of a childhood trauma. The circumstances under which Storm acquired this distinguishing characteristic are particular to an experience within her fictionalized background, meaning that the trauma that conferred her weakness had to be reiterated every time her origin story was told over the years. Along with her racialized appearance, which was set in place when the character was conceived as the Black Cat, the story that introduced Storm's powers and her weakness insisted on her racial background and established her point of departure from an African setting. Her recruitment by the X-Men's leader, Professor X, situates her on a unique trajectory through diaspora.

The initial scene depicting Storm's origin, scripted by writer Len Wein in 1975, suggested that the character emerged outside of "civilization." Chris Claremont, who would write many of the issues that brought Storm's character to maturity, had looked askance at this narrative because it was superficial: "Rather than just like here are these poor benighted savages, and here's this creature of power and they go, 'Ooooo,' let's give it a rationale consistent with the belief structures of that part of the world."¹¹ Taking advantage of the way in which storytelling involves many authors and takes place over long periods of time in comic books, after Wein and Cockrum had invented Storm, Claremont and artist John Byrne revised the character's history in ways that would give her more distinguishing features as an individual and establish local contexts in which her identity as a superhero and a person of African descent would be intelligible.

In *X-Men* #102 in 1976, Claremont and artist John Byrne provide an occasion for Storm to experience a flashback to her past. A supervillain confines the X-Men in a crumbling cellar, and a collapsing wall triggers Storm's claustrophobia—something readers have not known to be an important feature of her personality until this moment. She remembers the

event that traumatized her and the circumstances that led up to it. First, we see young Ororo and her Kenyan mother N'Dare departing Harlem with David Munroe, an upwardly mobile African American photojournalist. While David Munroe is working in Cairo, a military plane crash destroys the family's home, killing both of young Ororo's parents and leaving her trapped beneath the rubble.¹² The orphan girl survives, and with the aid of her superpowers, she wanders from her urban environs to the village where she would eventually meet Professor X in a scene like the one depicted by Wein and Cockrum in *Giant Size X-Men* #1.

So banal, so grounded in geopolitical dynamics associated with North Africa and the Middle East was the source of Storm's mortal fear that as time passed, readers and writers could transpose its details onto a different set of events in recent history. Claremont came to explain the plane crash behind Storm's trauma as an event during the conflict for control of the Suez Canal in 1956. However, as years went by, and that incident faded from recent memory, he rewrote his version of the events, first associating them with the Six-Day War of 1967 and later indicating that they took place during the Arab–Israeli conflict of 1973.¹³ Obviously, these revisions prioritized the task of providing readers with a historical frame of reference for Storm's individual characteristics and her displacement from home over that of devising a plausible African cosmology for Storm's role as a “goddess.” The proverbial village where Storm would meet Professor X was placed outside of time, but as her origin story moved forward in history, the time outside of which the village stood changed.

The village where Storm would meet Professor X is separated from modernity in general and specifically separated from the shifting historical reference points at work in successive versions of the *X-Men* narrative. As a space to which Storm disappears from modernity and narrative time, so that she can return to them as a superhero, the village might be considered as an artifact of the speculative fiction of Blackness. The abstract, drought-stricken African village with no autochthonous referent for a mutant takes on a genre-specific significance by making her superpowers, rather than her Blackness and gender, the defining features of Storm's identity. Under the imaginary conditions the comic book envisions, that superhuman quality brings her to the attention of the X-Men. Meanwhile, in the world the reader lives in, Storm's race and gender are her distinguishing features, and her mutant powers are taken for granted within the textual milieu where they occur. The concrete events in North Africa and its environs that keep the comic timely for groups of

readers across the decades are only meaningful as formative settings for Storm's character in relation to the opaque, ahistorical location that the village represents. The speculative fiction of Blackness is a name for the way settings like Storm's place of origin can function outside of modern conventions of time and space by virtue of their racial and national specificity. It is a name for a space of representation, situated at the periphery of the metropolitan landscape, from which a character like Storm enters into diaspora and into cultural production on nonrealist premises.¹⁴ In the case of this character, becoming legible alongside White characters, according to their spaces of representation and categories of identification, like "mutant," entails entering into the discourse of speculative fiction.

Enter: The Phoenix

In the same issue of *X-Men* in which Storm took on a more nuanced origin narrative, the text also took part in depicting Black womanhood through the repertoire of blaxploitation, which was contemporary with these texts. As Storm experiences her flashback, a Black female character named Misty Knight greets Professor X at the bedside of another main character, Jean Grey. The *X-Men* comics of this period featured Jean Grey's transformation into and out of the persona of the Phoenix as their primary plot. The adventures of Storm in the past and present were a subplot amid these developments. Misty Knight, depicted as Jean Grey's roommate in New York, is a secondary character who adds additional depth to events at the margins of the Phoenix saga. Although the story foregrounds issues related to superpowers, the presence of Storm and Misty Knight in the main character's circle of friends raises the unresolved question of what it meant that the closest peers of Jean Grey, unlike most White women and most White superheroes, were two exceptional Black women.

Misty Knight emerged in the pages of a comic book titled *Marvel Team-Up* in 1972. As I discuss later in this volume regarding the phenomenon of "crossover" in comics, a team-up or crossover story seeks to parlay fans' existing interest in one character into curiosity about others. Ever the supporting character, Knight was introduced as the sidekick for a martial artist superhero, Iron Fist. A street-smart former police officer turned private detective, bearing a bionic arm, Misty Knight drops the g from her present participle and punctuates her admonitions to villains, "Buster!" She wears a natural hairstyle twice the diameter of her head. Blaxploitation

comics were a thriving part of the marketplace in the 1970s. Marvel's *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire*, depicting a none-too-bright mercenary, and DC's *Black Lightning* are enduring examples from the era.¹⁵

Misty Knight's appearance in *X-Men* alongside Storm and Phoenix displays a lingering tension within representations of Black women in popular culture. Alongside the Phoenix character's ability to contain multitudes, both light and dark, there is an implicit dichotomy between Misty Knight and Storm. In vulgar terms, Misty Knight plays the "Amazon" to Storm's "Black Lady" archetype.¹⁶ Misty Knight's racially suggestive name, her colloquial speech, her urban spatial context, and her enhanced physical strength represent elements that are notably absent from Storm. Misty's bionic strength situates her status as a superhero within her body, whereas Storm exerts control over her external environment. Storm models an untouchable serenity able to keep the forces of nature at bay, while Misty Knight wields her powers with immediacy. Viewed as variations on a single racialized and gendered iconography, Knight and Storm bring very different associations with Black womanhood to mind when they are juxtaposed in the same text because their attributes derive from different genre contexts, with Misty Knight reinforcing recognizable iterations of Blackness and Storm displacing them.

The horizons of Black female superheroes appear much broader, however, when we situate them as local mediations of a global context rather than considering them within a binary structured by genre distinctions. The storied crossover between blaxploitation and martial arts action cinema, exemplified by Jim Kelly's performance in Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* (1973) and his subsequent lead role as *Black Belt Jones* (1974), extends to comics through Knight's role in the martial arts-themed *Iron Fist*.¹⁷ While Misty Knight resembles film heroine Cleopatra Jones, both of these blaxploitation women played their parts alongside Asian and Asian American heroes in comic books and film. Thus there was already a degree of overlap between genres at work in the characterization of Misty Knight, making it difficult to reduce her difference from Storm to a matter of belonging within one genre (speculative fiction, blaxploitation) or another (superheroes, martial arts). To complicate matters further, Storm also appears in stories shaped by Afro-Asian, Afro-Native, and diasporic connections that reconfigure the genre traditions she draws into conversation in *X-Men*. In the course of journeys across frames of reference structured by race, space, and subculture, the transformations of Storm that I discuss in the following pages exemplify how many different things

Black womanhood can be made to mean within texts that suture its significance to an evolving genre tradition.

An Ethics of Betrayal

Japan would be the setting for a pivotal moment in Storm's transformation, but first, events closer to home for the X-Men would place her character in the spotlight. Like Uhura's mandate to add "color to the bridge" in *Star Trek*, Storm was initially introduced to contribute to the X-Men's newly internationalized cast. The 1975 relaunch of the series not only augmented the roster of mutant superheroes in the Marvel universe but also provided an occasion to change the interpersonal dynamics among old characters. The most significant change in the series was the redefinition of the roles of its male and female leads. The only female member of the original team, Jean Grey, was taken out of action by the precipitous events of the Phoenix saga. Grey's apparent death led her love interest and longtime head of the team, Cyclops, to abdicate his position, leaving Storm to become the new leader. Grey returns from the dead—it is a comic book, after all—but Cyclops does not return to the relationship or the team for some time.

Storm's authority was questionable from the start: when a former adversary seeks refuge at the X-Men's headquarters in issue #170, Storm is headstrong in her opposition to the idea. The Professor undermines her decision, but the vocal effort she makes underscores her will to lead.¹⁸ The issues of *X-Men* that portray Storm as a leader compose an important era in comics' history by ceding a prominent role to a Black female character. The hero and his love interest once determined the emphasis of both the mundane and genre-specific aspects of the series. Storm's leadership heralds an egalitarian future driven by interests that cross boundaries of race, nation, and gender, furthering the series's utopian message. She has a desolate personal life during this time, however, as the comics depict her as unconcerned with romance, initially, and her best friend, Jean Grey, was dead.

In a 1983 interview, Chris Claremont recounts a conversation that led to a development in his colleague Louise Simonson's personal life making its way into *X-Men*. Simonson had cut her hair, and the shock with which her young children reacted to her new appearance spurred Claremont to think, "God, that would be so cool to do to Kitty."¹⁹ Simonson conveys how her children burst into tears at the sudden realization that

their mother, whose consistency gave them a sense of security, had a will of her own. The young character Kitty Pryde was in a similar position to react with such disquiet owing to the sisterly and familial relationship she had developed with Storm. Over the course of several issues, Claremont and the artistic team laid the groundwork for a transition in Storm's appearance and personality that would gratify the writers' desire to show young Kitty Pryde experiencing shock from the actions of an important adult in her life. Claremont, Simonson, and the artists were inspired by an investment in the impact that changing Storm's appearance would have on spectators, who are represented by Kitty within the text.

The realization that adults are not the ideal figures children imagine them to be occurs as a milestone in many texts, from Freud to *Harry Potter*. In some sense, learning to cope with the discrepancy between one's own desires and the conditions that prevail in the world is a prerequisite to individual maturity. One manifestation of this dilemma, the formative quality of making sense of the split between mother and child, is a touchstone of Kleinian psychoanalysis. Critics informed by this school of thought point out that appreciating the sense of loss that comes with this distinction, and eventually working through the infantile desire to do symbolic and literal violence to the figure of the mother, is a fundamental task in human development.²⁰ Claremont recognized how Simonson's experience with her children might resonate with the readers of *X-Men*, imagined to be currently or recently Kitty Pryde's age, due to the salience of these familiar scripts. Though the life lessons that proceed from the trauma of realizing one's parents are separate from one's childhood self may be universal, peculiar consequences follow from arranging this spectacle through the figures of an adult Black woman and a White youth.

In the spectacle of Storm's transformation, her relationship to young Kitty Pryde models the ways in which White Americans have learned to perceive women of African descent as caretakers. Despite the many routes they have taken in matters of work and family, Black women have been associated with mothering other people's children, particularly White children, since the era of slavery. As the mothers of enslaved children, as nurses and surrogates, and, later, as domestic employees, the particular roles to which Black women have been consigned historically form a reliable basis for the interpretation of stereotypes as well as spectacular exceptions to them. As I argued in the previous chapter, repudiating stereotypical roles was a powerful motivation in Nichelle Nichols's performance as Uhura. Negating the negative presumptions ascribed to Black womanhood by

others is one aim of Black women's creativity, and in the absence of that formative influence, the story of Storm disappointing Kitty Pryde only achieves that negation as an indirect consequence. The spectacle occurs primarily as a scene from the life of the child approaching maturity. If we consider Storm's identification as a Black woman as the focal point of the spectacle, however, we might rethink the transition she makes in terms of what it means for viewers to see her defy her own previous embodiment of racialized and gendered expectations. Kitty's shocked reaction to Storm's transformation rehearses the scene discussed by Claremont and Simonson, as planned, but it also betrays the meanings that had previously accrued to Storm's identity as Black, female, and superhero.

The character's transformation becomes legible in the text as she sheds the connotations of being a superhero. For a fleeting moment in *X-Men* #186, Storm loses control of her superhuman immunity to the elements, feeling the effect of a chill wind for the first time in her adult life. Months later, on a mission to rescue a member of the X-Men who has been taken captive, she leads the team through tunnels beneath the Manhattan subway that recall the traumatic incident behind her claustrophobia. In this primal scene that reiterates a key aspect of her personality, Storm begins her transformation in earnest. She is retaining her human characteristics while losing those that are superhuman. In two stories, titled "Catacombs" and "Dancin' in the Dark," Storm must fight the leader of another group of mutants, the Morlocks, to win back a member of the X-Men who has been taken captive. When they reveal themselves to the X-Men, the subterranean-dwelling Morlocks helpfully recount their origins from the annals of literary history, attributing their moniker to H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Separated from the world by the unusual physical appearances that accompany their mutant powers, the Morlocks are the dystopian counterparts to the desirable vision the X-Men project from their Westchester County mansion headquarters. Whereas the X-Men represent various "normal" human appearances augmented only by invisible mutant powers, the Morlocks embody difference in an unsettling form, revealing a hierarchy between mutants who enjoy the privilege of passing for human and those who do not.

The duel to win back her teammate pits Storm, without the aid of her weather-controlling powers, against a ruthless aggressor named Callisto.²¹ The X-Men call Callisto a "witch" before the first panel that depicts her threatening visage. She wears a torn shirt and a waist-length purple vest, a patch over one eye, and chains, and she carries a pocketknife. She

has taken the X-Men's blond-haired playboy Angel as a hostage, naming him her "prince" and "the most beautiful man in the world." Storm explains to her teammates that Callisto has not done this out of love but out of "desire, quite a different thing altogether." Thinking of Callisto's desirous gaze, Storm recalls a moment from her childhood:

I was twelve when I saw a man so gaze at me—a prize to be won, an object to be possessed. My emotions, my wishes, meant nothing. Had I fought, my spirit would have been broken. I would have been used, then slain. So, instead, I ran away, from all that I knew and loved, never to return.²²

These words, conveyed from within a thought balloon to separate them from her spoken dialogue, invoke Storm's revised origin narrative. The memory from her youth conjured by Callisto's gaze reinscribes Storm's vulnerability, but it also highlights her resilience in the face of adversity.

Storm assumes attributes of the Morlocks' leader, one by one. First, Storm addresses Callisto as a leader among mutants, equating their status in order to claim the right to challenge her authority. At the pivotal moment in their duel, Storm snatches the knife Callisto has thrown at her right out of the air. After the fight, Storm wears Callisto's vest to address the Morlocks as their new leader, and she is depicted wearing it around the house when the X-Men return to their headquarters in the following issue. One of her teammates thinks, "Ororo is changing—before my eyes—but what truly terrifies me is that she doesn't seem to mind."²³

Although other characters hope to see Storm's internal turmoil resolved on desirable terms, to restore the Storm they know and value, she will instead turn those changes outward for reasons of her own. By vanquishing Callisto and literally taking up her mantle, Storm rehearses an investment in the social—and local—meaning of fashion that has been recognized by scholars such as Dick Hebdige and Angela McRobbie. Storm's appropriation of Callisto's devil-may-care affect through punk fashion, BDSM iconography, and androgyny recurs in her trip to Japan with the X-Men. By appropriating Callisto's style, Storm has already shown an affinity for the personal traits her former adversary represents; now, she will see a similar attitude embodied by a more desirable character.

In *X-Men* #172, in August 1983, a character named Yukio appears from out of the X-Men's past. The team is in Japan to pursue an adventure rooted in the life of the popular X-Men character Wolverine. Wolverine is planning to marry Lady Mariko Yashida, a wealthy woman with whom he shares a checkered past, but deadly opponents complicate their plans.

Yukio appears in an acrobatic flurry during the issue's events and nearly falls from a building, but Storm summons a wind to fly to her rescue. The two become fast friends as Yukio explains her penchant for danger: "Life is the ultimate adventure, Wind-Rider. And death the prize that awaits us all."

Like Storm in relation to Misty Knight, Yukio departs radically from the sexual-racial tropes that her counterpart Lady Mariko Yashida represents. While Lady Mariko appears as a self-effacing, delicate, sexually available archetype of Japanese femininity, Yukio identifies as female and embodies



In *X-Men* #172, Storm meets the enigmatic Yukio and saves her life. Copyright Marvel Entertainment.

a trope for Japanese *masculinity*. According to Wolverine, Yukio identifies as a ronin. *Ronin* is a term for a samurai with no feudal allegiance that lends national specificity to an ennobling warrior trope. In the Western film tradition, where non-Japanese actors have invoked the discourse of space and time that is wrapped around the figure of the samurai, the ronin is an archetype nested within a myth.²⁴ Its use signals a form of alterity born out of an alternative cultural frame of reference. As embodied by an Asian character, the role of ronin complicates emasculating racial stereotypes by supplanting the notion of Asian men as incapable of strength, independence, and confrontation. At the same time, it reinforces conventions of racial difference in its performative authenticating function; as a term that travels but does not translate, it signals the gender and nationality of its subject while taking exception to the meanings conventionally ascribed to Japanese masculinity in a European and American context. The X-Men's primary Japanese counterparts, the demure Lady Yashida and the menacing Silver Samurai, fit into roles that readers will recognize. Yukio's female masculinity, however, marks her as a figure of ambiguity. This makes her an ideal interlocutor for the changing Storm.

A fictionalized Asian setting affords the Black heroine an escape, enabling her to take up and remove the trappings of racial and sexual identification as easily as she might change clothes or hairstyles. Storm finds herself enamored with Yukio's carefree sensibility, laying the foundation for further transformation. When the two of them confront the Silver Samurai to protect Lady Mariko, Storm feels mortal danger at his superior fighting skill. Unlike her fair fight with Callisto, in this situation, she can overpower her opponent by striking him with lightning. Unfortunately, Storm's out-of-control assault produces an electrical fire that consumes her own costume. She retreats with Yukio—wearing a kimono that Lady Mariko has left behind. In this succession of contacts with her Asian counterparts, Storm is auditioning for various new performances of race, gender, and power. Individually, she embodies the diversity that the X-Men had taken on in the aggregate in recent years. Whereas the team's membership came to incorporate individuals from different parts of the world, Storm recasts her own ensemble by taking on different aspects of several individuals. When she attacks a group of would-be thieves who threaten her and Yukio, Storm reflects, "I have never used my powers to deliberately inflict pain."²⁵ Her newfound will to do harm becomes a cartoonish mix of hedonism and sadism as she gleefully confides to Yukio, "Whatever it means—this madness of yours that has infected me—I welcome it!"²⁶

Storm alters her persona according to a willful embrace of Yukio's perversity. Having succumbed to her new friend's "infect[ious]" charm in Japan, she takes on a new appearance that defies explanation in terms of her own history. The next time we see her, after artist Paul Smith has run free with Claremont's idea to change her look, Storm wears a tall punk rock haircut, eyeliner, leather accessories, and a vest much like Callisto's.²⁷ She is no longer a naturally feminine earth mother, nor is she suddenly a Nubian warrior princess or an urban vigilante in the mold of Misty Knight.



Storm reveals her transformed image to a young friend who has always relied on her: the shocked and disappointed teenage superhero Kitty Pryde. Copyright Marvel Entertainment.

Whereas Storm's Black identity typically signified her difference from Jean Grey and Kitty Pryde, White female characters, she appears to speak with a voice of her own after forging an affinity with Yukio, another woman of color. It may not have been the writers' intent to construct Storm's transformation along these lines any more than it was their intent to make all of the X-Men White in previous years, but it has a significant impact on what the character's appearance suggests about the relationship between race, nation, gender, and subculture, nonetheless.

As usual, Storm's first words when she sees Kitty Pryde are, "Hullo, Kit-ten."²⁸ In her new guise, however, the reassuring greeting she has traditionally offered her young friend has become a melancholy seduction. Kitty's tearful response, "How could you!?" rejects Storm's transformation as a betrayal.

Storm's transformation is a meditation on the shifting ideals of the *X-Men* comics, yet her altered appearance is the only straightforward indicator of how things have changed. Other characters perform their questionable new directions in a subtler fashion. Kitty expresses disbelief at Storm's accoutrements while she herself has dressed up like Mariko Yashida—kimono, wig, and all—for Wolverine's wedding rehearsal. The X-Men's former leader, Cyclops (now a wedding guest), asks, passively aggressively, "It is a rather striking change, Ororo. Why'd you do it?" As Storm answers, she's equally shocked to see Scott's new partner, who is the spitting image of the dead Jean Grey, but she says nothing. Professor X wonders, "Is this some whim . . . or indicative of a deeper, more serious metamorphosis?"²⁹ The depiction of other characters in the ensemble questioning the meaning of Storm's new appearance leaves the audience wondering how to reconcile her new persona with her role as a standard-bearer for the text's utopian vision. The notion that Storm could rearticulate her role in the X-Men's mission unsettles the mission itself. If the racial and gender performance the character had once embodied was instrumental to the text's portrayal of an international, interracial, gender-equitable utopian destiny, a dream of human-mutant cooperation that thinly allegorized the pursuit of racial harmony, liberal feminism, and benign Cold War internationalism, how can that vision remain attainable if Storm's Black womanhood no longer fits into it in a recognizable way? Does the character still represent Black womanhood? Did she ever represent it to begin with?

With her betrayal accomplished, the extratextual premise for Storm's transformation is complete. Storm offers an account of herself to the

tearful young Kitty Pryde, but her new presence is not consoling. There is, in the aftermath of this transformation, more uncertainty than revelation. One of the avenues that Ororo's decision to change her appearance opens up, however, is the possibility that reneging on the promises offered by her former persona allows her to fulfill the potential that comes with a new role. In reconstructing this small moment within the history of popular culture, I have returned to the question of what it means for Storm, a blonde (or white-haired) woman with blue eyes, to embody Blackness in the *X-Men* comics: does the idealization of Eurocentric standards of beauty she obviously represents betray the unattainable nature of the global vision of the comic book utopia? If it ever held any promise in the first place, what does her appearance mean in the aftermath of the aforementioned scene?

I invoked the title of a vital work by Crystal Parikh, *An Ethics of Betrayal*, to name the conditions that Storm's transformed image set into motion. The imaginary synthesis of Black and White features that Storm represents consolidates qualities that are identified with several groups into a single figure. Rather than reconciling the disparities between them, the combination of these distinguishing features connotes ambivalence. Evidence of this ambivalence arises not only out of the uneasy dynamics of representing Blackness in a genre that eschews meaningful engagement with Black American, African, and diasporic cultural production but also out of the tension that accompanies the character's aesthetic shift from one subcultural frame of reference to another. Once the text has cast off an aesthetic strategy that supposedly suited its rhetorical purposes, thereby admitting its failure or exhaustion, it is hard to imagine that a turn to a new style comes with any guarantee of effectiveness. The betrayal signified by Storm's confrontation with her disappointed sister-daughter does not only sever their relationship; it underscores the lost value of its previous meaning. "Betrayals are only possible," Parikh writes, "because of the inveterate attachments that the subject forgoes, in an act that evinces those attachments even as it violates them."³⁰ By conscripting Storm's appearance into the project of reconciling a form of marginality specific to the field of cultural production (being a mutant) with the forms of marginality lived by social subjects (Black womanhood), the post-1975 *X-Men* texts attempted to transfer an aesthetic strategy to politics. By failing to sustain a coherent vision of Black womanhood as part of this strategy, the text performs its acknowledgment that no single notion of what Black womanhood means is fully, permanently compatible with the meaning of being a mutant.

Insofar as the text betrayed readers' expectations, it also betrayed the limitations of the authors' vision for Storm as a Black female character. Betrayal can be the occasion for a reckoning, in Parikh's words—a counting of the “costs, to the self and to others” that it always incurs.³¹ In the remaining pages, I gesture toward subsequent iterations of the character that elaborate on her significance in the aftermath of the transformation. A reading that extends to the present would be beyond the scope of this book, but in the rest of this chapter, I recommend using the lens of ethical critique that Parikh outlines to understand how the *X-Men* comic books have tried to enumerate the costs of the ongoing effort by SF writers and artists to represent utopian ideals through figures for racialized, gendered, national, and subcultural difference, like the image of Storm.

LifeDeath: A Love Story

Looking back at comic books in search of answers to the foregoing questions about how the meaning of Storm's image functions in new ways over time, my favorite story to reread has been “LifeDeath,” a two-part *X-Men* narrative focused on the character after her transformation. Whereas her changing self-presentation coincided with coming into her own as a superhero, the events of “LifeDeath” used a generic device—the loss of her superpowers—to bracket Ororo's persona in psychological terms. The story initiated her first romantic liaison in the series, and its conclusion unfolded alongside yet another retelling of her origin story. “LifeDeath” summarizes Storm's significance as a representative figure for the relationship between the social forces that marginalize Black womanhood and the cultural distinctions that mark superhero comics as a genre.

The notion that mutant superpowers are both a blessing and a curse poses the characters in *X-Men* with a central question throughout the series: what would their lives be like if they were not mutants? The literary antecedents for the *X-Men* comics demonstrated how undesirable a superhuman status might become in certain social conditions. In addition to invoking H. G. Wells through the Morlocks in the story of Storm's confrontation with Callisto, the series also names its heroes “children of the atom,” echoing a serial novella by feminist SF writer Wilmar Shiras.³² In *X-Men*, “children of the atom” denotes the conceit that mutants appeared in the human population in great numbers at the dawn of the nuclear age. The structure of feeling that characterizes “children of the atom” in the *X-Men* comics is also indebted to Shiras. Her novella depicts a group of

exceptionally intelligent young people, the children of workers in the nuclear power industry, who are forced to live in seclusion under the pretense of adult identities to publicize their helpful scientific innovations. The “children of the atom” fear discovery and persecution, just as the X-Men fight to preserve the safety of a world that hates and fears mutants, and mutants who can hide their true identities from the public tend to do so in the comics.

The anguished, repressed desire to be identified as a “normal” human, which every character in the *X-Men* comics voices sooner or later, manifests in Ororo’s encounter with a Native American mutant inventor named Forge. Using his mutant ability to intuitively understand and manipulate technology, Forge has developed a weapon that can neutralize other mutants’ superpowers. In *X-Men* #185, after a year’s worth of comics had acquainted readers with her altered persona, Ororo is unknowingly exposed to Forge’s device and rendered unconscious. She and Forge grow close as she recovers at his home laboratory. The scenario draws attention to Forge’s Cheyenne background and his prosthetic leg to juxtapose the different ways in which the two characters are marginalized; her proverbial disempowerment ostensibly allows Ororo to sympathize with Forge’s disability. Eventually, she discovers that it was Forge’s weapon that took away her superpowers, and upon finding out that he has concealed this from her, she retreats, dejected. While it lasts, their liaison is a window into what Storm’s life might be like if she was no longer a mutant; she would still be a Black woman, and she might still form an intimate relationship with another person of color. It is hard to discern whether she would be motivated to understand Forge’s disability, his reclusiveness, or his sense of alienation, but the fact that she is depicted as a Black woman makes these possibilities meaningful in ways unrelated to the question of whether she is depicted as a mutant. It is not clear what importance Chris Claremont accords to disability, race, gender, and loss, in an interview, when he characterizes the pairing of Ororo and Forge by saying, “In a way, he’s as damaged goods as she is.”³³

Whether he was aware of its stigmatizing connotations or not, Claremont’s rendition of the pair as “damaged goods” simultaneously romanticizes and pathologizes the circumstances of Storm’s identification with Forge. Whereas *X-Men* tends to rely on the mutant conceit as an allegory for racial and ethnic difference, the portrayal of disability as tantamount to the loss of mutant powers in “LifeDeath” betrays an effort to think critically about specifically different forms of marginalization in the text,

although the effort is halting and deeply compromised. The neutralizing device Forge has invented allows the reader to imagine that disability is a potential possibility for all persons at all times. The implications of being disabled in particular ways are socially constructed, primarily by the able-bodied, but vulnerability to certain embodied conditions of disempowerment and disadvantage is universal.³⁴ In “LifeDeath,” being a mutant is unlike being disabled, but being deprived of one’s mutant superpowers, within the text, serves as a metaphorical point of departure toward understanding what it is like to be disabled.

The asymmetry between the actual and imagined categories of identification represented by Forge and Storm, respectively, makes this story more compelling than a simple allegory between being disabled and being a “mutant.” In “LifeDeath,” Storm and Forge perform an oddly conceived and contingent gesture to understand one another that signals the limitations of the text’s reliance on speculative fiction as a lens through which to apprehend and critique specific conditions of marginalization in society. The removal of a paraliterary textual device—Storm’s superpowers—that serves to distinguish *X-Men* as speculative fiction reveals how genre distinctions, as mechanisms that mediate but do not mirror relationships between material and cultural phenomena, are built on a foundation of race thinking, gender ideology, and practices of embodiment that equate able-bodiedness with advantage and disability with disadvantage.

The second part of “LifeDeath” is more tragic and less romantic than the first, but elements of both story structures remain. Without her powers, Ororo wanders to East Africa on a soul-searching pilgrimage. She encounters the sole survivor of a bus crash, a pregnant woman named Shani, and she helps the woman return home for care. The pilgrimage does not lead Ororo to the primitive site of a village but to a deindustrialized and desertified small town that once thrived on commercial farming. She observes Shani’s shocked reaction, thinking, “She is as stunned by this sight as I. It is not as she remembers. Such a drastic change in so short a time—what could have happened?!”³⁵ After Ororo applies her minimal training in emergency medical care to assist in the delivery of Shani’s child,³⁶ an elder demystifies the town’s desperate circumstances:

Outlanders came with their machines and their technology, promising to make the desert bloom. And they proved as good as their word—our land turned green and verdant. The old ways, we gladly cast aside—believing we would never need them again. For a while, we held paradise in our hands.

But each year, more fertilizer was required to raise the same amount of food. Our flocks overgrazed the land, and the simoon winds blew away the topsoil. There was war. It became harder and harder to acquire fuel for the machines. And when they broke down . . . we could not afford parts to fix them.³⁷

The elder's words to Ororo evoke a tension in "LifeDeath II" between the setting's tragic backdrop and its precarious future, signified by Ororo's decision to bring an infant into the situation. The elder, Mjnari, confides in Ororo that he has resolved to commit suicide to secure a distribution of resources in the community that allows Shani's child to live. This new tradition keeps the town in a state of dynamic equilibrium: it will not grow, but it must change. Ororo recounts Mjnari's last words: advice to her that she should preside over the transition between a clash of "two great cultures," one "very old" and the other "very new," though the question of which is which remains ambiguous. Ororo is asked to be "a bridge . . . a person who is both one and the other, whose mind comprehends and whose hands command the machines, yet whose eyes—and soul—look upon them with the wisdom of the ages." Having survived the hazards of her identification as a mutant while also having weathered the temporary loss of this aspect of her identity, Storm signifies a dual sense of belonging within the genre frame of reference of the text. Given the setting in which her new position as a bridge comes to light, however, it is impossible not also to read the African and American lineages represented by the character as elements in a similar juxtaposition.

Things Will Be Different

In a comic book released simultaneously with the "LifeDeath" story that presents Ororo coming to grips with her changes, the X-Men's younger allies, the New Mutants, find themselves transported through time and space to encounter the qualities Storm represents in another historical situation. They meet a woman who looks just like Ororo in ancient Egypt.³⁸ According to legend, the New Mutants learn, Ororo's ancestor Ashake was her era's incarnation of a line of African priestesses bearing the recognizable features of blue eyes and silver hair. Ashake's appearance is an instance of the literary device of prolepsis: the character situated later in history makes her own ancestor look familiar. It is tempting to read this revisionist stroke as a means of distancing Storm from "Blackness." Inserting the

features that distinguish the racial meaning of skin color from those of eye and hair color deep into Ororo's ancestry suggests that the latter-day character was never authentically Black and was therefore compatible with the essentially Western frame of reference assumed by superhero comics. At the same time, however, the proleptic gesture reinforces the lesson of Ororo's return to East Africa in "LifeDeath." Looking back at a site that it has defined in essentialist terms, the text attempts to remediate it as a place of continuity as well as change. Ancient Egypt, long understood as a liminal topic in both essentialist and antiessentialist strains of modern African historiography, seems a perfect place to position a hypothetical point of origin for Storm's appearance. The notion of mutant superpowers as part of Black women's heritage provides the basis for a new genealogy of racial diversity among superheroes. Storm's appearance in the *X-Men*, according to this comic's lesson from the past, is not a function of modern liberal utopia but an aspect of the long-overlooked cultural frames of reference that might be called upon to inform speculative fiction.

In *Giant Size X-Men* #1, from 1975, Ororo looks the part of a modernized emissary from a timeless, venerated place. She could perform her "native" people's formal traditions through language and dress, with a Swahili name, flowing garments, and a characteristic reverence for nature, even as she abandoned their persistent interest in having a rain goddess to protect them from drought. Her presence in *X-Men* enabled, and in fact demanded, a performance of essentialism to shore up the text's internationalist credentials. Storm's role on the team, emphasized by her leadership role, sought to resolve the contradictions inherent in a utopian vision that lays claim to pluralism, paradoxically, through appeals to essentialist tropes. Yet Storm was removed from her "native" frame of reference in a revision to her origin story that constructed the village where she was discovered as both a destination for her to reach after her birth in the modern world and a point of departure back into it. Removed from her transitional identity as a standard-bearer for the international cadre of mutant superheroes, she became an introspective dissident who took her inspiration from a villainous outcast and a ronin. Finally, stripped of her powers and betrayed by her fellow mutant, an outsider with social and personal dilemmas of his own, she appears as a diasporic Black woman in postindustrial Africa—again. While some stories in *X-Men* depict Ororo's Black womanhood as ancillary to her role as a superhero, her transformations, like the mythology behind Ororo's ancestry in *New Mutants*,

foreground the “uncanny” quality of the text: the novel guises in which it represents questions of identity and marginalization resonate most deeply when they emerge from behind the veil of metaphor to invoke the very familiar social conditions they mediate.

On the last page of *X-Men* #198, Ororo walks away from the desperate town defiant, proclaiming herself “a bridge, not simply between old ways and new, but between races as well.”³⁹ In the genre context, she refers to “humanity and its mutant children,” but humanity and its mutant children have always been ciphers for more and less empowered racial groups, disabled people, sexual minorities, subjects of gender and nations. The allegorical thrust of *X-Men*’s cultural work grew all the more insistent with the new team of which Storm was an integral part, yet growth within her role had since altered the meaning of the comics’ utopian narrative. After the new beginning of the series with *Giant Size X-Men* #1 in May 1975, it resumed its numbering with #94 in August; more than one hundred issues and a decade later, at the conclusion of “LifeDeath,” both the players in the series and the fictionalized world stage on which they appeared to act had changed. Chris Claremont’s philosophy throughout his lengthy tenure on the series held that “the X-Men should change, should evolve. If you leave the book for 50 issues, then come back, things will be different. If you leave for a hundred issues and come back, things will be way different.”⁴⁰

Other venues, including comics, provided numerous opportunities to exploit Black women’s liminal position between fantasized strength and desirability, on one hand, and actual vulnerabilities, on the other. In “Life-Death,” Ororo was no longer the representation of Black womanhood she was designed to be, nor was she even a superhero, for a time. The character did not transcend the politics of representation, but given the time and space to do so, she did come to stand for potentially transformative questions about their importance.

4

CONTROVERSY AND CROSSOVER IN
MILESTONE MEDIA'S *ICON*

Maybe I'll stop reading so much Zora Neale Hurston and start reading more Octavia Butler. It seems appropriate, considering that I live in the future.

—**RAQUEL ERVIN/ROCKET**, *ICON* #29, SEPTEMBER 1995

THE “LONG, HOT SUMMER” WAS A THREE-MONTH “crossover” in which comic books published by Milestone Media weaved together a story about what happens when the future arrives in urban America. The character of Raquel Ervin whom Milestone readers come to know as Rocket, the idealistic and reflective protagonist of *Icon* and sidekick to the eponymous superhero, frames the events of *Icon* #29 and shows the reader the rise and fall of the Utopia amusement park in the fictitious city of Dakota. Granted the power to store and redirect kinetic energy through the use of *Icon*’s advanced extraterrestrial technology, Rocket soars above the city and surveys the unrest in neighborhoods disrupted by the construction of the futuristic attraction. Raquel and her family were evicted so that their housing project could be demolished to make way for Utopia Park.¹ As she comes down to Earth to police the insurrection, she explains to an indignant crowd and to the Utopia Park contractor they are confronting, “I live in this neighborhood. I’m not going to let you tear it down.”

As I discussed in a previous chapter, Black characters have existed in superhero comics throughout the twentieth century. Like Rocket, they have confronted racism and gentrification before, as well as criminal, cosmic, and supernatural threats. This chapter focuses on a phenomenon like no other in the history of popular media in the United States: the brief crossover success and controversial legacy of a Black-owned publisher of multicultural superhero comics, Milestone Media. It is my intention to

show that in its flagship title, *Icon*, Milestone augmented the conventions of representing both the futuristic world of superhero comics and the historically constrained politics of Black culture in the urban United States. *Icon* positioned a highly intellectual Black female protagonist, Rocket, in a critical dialogue with comics fandom. By portraying the narrative as a story told by Rocket about creating a superhero and becoming one, I argue that *Icon* makes the fantastic discourse of superhero comics subject to the critical insights and political priorities ascribed to Black youth in the urban United States. This analysis continues my exploration of the expansion of the speculative fiction genre from marginal to popular status in twentieth-century American culture.

Icon was one of the first four titles published by Milestone Media, along with *Hardware*, *Static*, and *Blood Syndicate*. The company was founded in the early 1990s by Black comics innovators and a business leader, Derek Dingle, editor of *Black Enterprise* magazine. Milestone enjoyed a distribution arrangement with DC Comics that made the smaller company's comics available to as many retailers as those of the larger one. Milestone comics thus courted a crossover audience, participating in a phenomenon familiar to observers of popular media and marketing in which products reach consumers outside of a single targeted group. The audiences brought together through the phenomenon of crossover, particularly in the popular music industry, where this phenomenon commands significant attention, are typically defined in terms of genre as well as race, ethnicity, and linguistic and national identity.² Crossover is, furthermore, a way to describe the movement across the field of cultural production that takes place when works produced in the academy, like this one, address a popular audience.

The case of Milestone Media reveals how the possibility for controversy is inherent in crossover. When cultural production reaches diverse groups of consumers, it invites competing critiques. Crossover complicates the way audience members relate to a text because it positions them in new, blended interpretive communities. When groups of readers from different backgrounds come to identify with the same protagonist in a text, for example, this sometimes leads them to identify with each other by recognizing interests and values they share. The situation facing readers in the issues of *Icon* surveyed in this chapter was not only a political controversy that positioned Rocket at the center of a contested area in public opinion but also a cultural controversy, because it faced the audience with a dilemma regarding how to read the text. The column for fan

letters printed in *Icon* staged an encounter between the genre conventions of cultural production within a familiar kind of speculative fiction text—the superhero comic—and the genre conventions that shape other popular representations of Black Americans.

Over the years it published comics regularly, Milestone generated buzz throughout the comics industry for its high-quality writing and artwork and for its portrayal of characters with different ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and sexualities in a fictitious East Coast city called Dakota. Other writers, including scholar Jeffrey Brown, and Milestone veterans, including comics writer Ivan Velez Jr. and the late Dwayne McDuffie, have commemorated the breadth of Milestone's achievements. Some properties originated by Milestone Media have since been integrated into the wider DC Comics superhero universe, keeping these diverse representations alive.

Icon began as the chronicle of the life of young Raquel Ervin, a teenager who met wealthy Black conservative Augustus Freeman IV when her friends attempted to rob his mansion. Raquel was astounded to see the knowledge in Augustus's library and nearly stole his computer; her cohorts were deterred from the burglary attempt and foiled in an effort to shoot him while making their escape by an astonishing display of power: Augustus Freeman had bulletproof skin, he could fly, and he was more than 150 years old. *Icon* recognizably appropriates the classic tale of DC Comics's Superman, but its story is grounded in the past and experiences of Black Americans. When the extraterrestrial who would become Icon falls to Earth (like Superman, the last son of Krypton), he lands in a field in the American South. The first human to find his small spacecraft is an enslaved Black woman named Miriam. With his alien race's advanced technology, the spacecraft reconfigures its passenger's DNA to afford him the opportunity to blend in with the inhabitants of the world where he has landed. Accordingly, Miriam opens the door to see a child who looks like her: healthy, young, and Black. She raises him in secret, and despite the superhuman strength, intelligence, and memories of his former life among his own people in space, the child grows up as a slave. His extraordinarily long life and superhuman advantages allow him to thrive and to keep his identity a secret until he reveals himself to Raquel.

Over the many years that the stories of superhero comics have become familiar to the public, authors who grew up reading comic books have offered creative reinterpretations of their founding myths. Mark Millar's *Superman: Red Son*, for example, explores what might have happened if



In *Icon #1*, the protagonist, young Raquel Ervin, asks Augustus Freeman, "What do you stand for?" Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

the last son of Krypton had landed in the Soviet Union instead of the American Midwest. Similarly, *Icon* questions the role of the superhero and the definition of humanity itself by situating its protagonist in relation to the planet Earth as a Black man and telling his story through the eyes of a Black woman. For *Icon*, humanity has a Black face, and slavery is an inextricable part of the human experience. *Icon* also augments the allegorical quality of superhero comics by bringing the critical insights of Black readers who grew up with varying degrees of alienation from speculative fiction to bear on the conventions that have shaped the medium over the years.

When Raquel returns to Freeman's home in daylight, awestruck and inspired, she proposes that he become a superhero and a symbol to the people of Dakota. She decides to become his partner (or sidekick) and comes up with the name "Rocket" for herself. When Augustus queries the superhero name Raquel has chosen for him ("Icon? What's that?"), she says, "It means like an example, or an ideal." Augustus advises, pedantically, "Actually, it's a symbol, something that stands for something else." Raquel counters, "Oh, yeah? What do *you* stand for?"

Rocket's estimable wit is one of her strengths, but she also takes on superpowers in her role as a hero. So that Rocket can protect herself as they work together to protect the city, Augustus gives Raquel a tool from his spacecraft that allows her to generate force fields and redirect energy, including absorbing the impact of bullets and falling from great heights without injury. The text occasionally recounts Augustus's background in space and his upbringing as the child of an enslaved woman who eventually attained freedom and prosperity. It also details Raquel's dreams of becoming a writer, "like Toni Morrison," in her words. Tension constantly arises between the two heroes as they fight those who prey on the less fortunate and undertake the challenge that falls to superheroes in many of Milestone's stories: to save humanity from its shortcomings. *Icon* portrays an abiding faith that humanity is basically good, alongside an understanding that people in constrained circumstances often make less-than-ideal decisions. It also posits the radical possibility that Blackness, which is the only identity Augustus has ever known on the planet Earth, can encompass the full range of what it means to be human. In the process, Augustus's and Raquel's perspectives frequently collide, provoking fans to think about problems that superheroes seldom face and to stand with Rocket, questioning what *Icon* stands for.

The most pitched conflict in *Icon* took place from mid-1993 to early 1994, beginning with the revelation that Raquel, who is fifteen years old,

is pregnant and contemplating an abortion. In what follows, I argue that Rocket/Raquel's role in *Icon* harnesses processes of storytelling characteristic of superhero comics to displace controversial political and economic considerations into a cultural register, thereby containing its controversy in a way that helped it achieve crossover. In examining how *Icon* portrays Rocket as both a reader and a storyteller, I detail how the series prioritizes aesthetic concerns. I argue that *Icon* mobilized the tactics of the superhero genre to limit the disruptive effects of its controversial subject matter by exploiting the tradition of crossover that occurs in superhero comics.

The formal devices available to comic books make it possible for the story of Rocket's decision to cross the boundaries between genre selectively. I observe how these devices operate in *Icon* in ways that encourage readers to revise the assumptions about sexual politics that shape how Raquel reconciles her aspirations as a superhero with the economic circumstances of her life. The vehicles for my examination of *Icon* are familiar to fans of speculative fiction in many media, but especially to comics readers: letter columns and crossover events. Correspondence printed in comics facilitates relationships among authors (writers and artists), readers, and editors, and crossovers, as I will describe them, enlist readers in the work of producing relationships between texts. Throughout this book, I argue that relations between producers and consumers are essential to understanding the interpretive conventions that characterize a genre. Rocket functions as the driving force in the making of a Black superhero narrative and a witness to it, drawing readers into a unique endeavor in thinking about race and genre.

Workplace and Marketplace

The letters column of *Icon* was a page at the end of each issue titled "Iconography." The history of fan letters in amateur and professional SF publications helps to explain why letters columns were so important to *Icon* and all of Milestone Media's comics. In *Comic Book Culture*, Matthew Pustz details the advent of letters pages in comics, a development that owes to the presence of Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz, former editors of the pulp era's *Fantasy Magazine*, on the staff at DC Comics. In 1958, Weisinger began printing readers' letters in DC titles featuring Superman. Will Jacobs and Gerard Jones's study *Comic Book Heroes from the Silver Age to the Present* explains the significance of this development: "after twenty years of costumed heroes, someone was finally asking the people who bought the comics what they wanted to read." A lifelong fan, Weisinger was already

receptive to the desires of readers.³ In 1961, in DC's *Brave and Bold*, Julius Schwartz followed Weisinger's lead and started to include correspondents' complete addresses along with their letters in the fan columns of the comics.⁴ Schwartz would go on to become a celebrated editor in chief at DC Comics.

Fan-editor interaction in the back pages of comic books came to comprise a characteristic aspect of the superhero milieu that linked the comic books with other science fiction and fantasy publications. The letters page is one of the sites at which genre traditions take on a concrete form. The appearance of letters pages in comic books in the 1990s was no surprise, but the early date at which such correspondence appeared in Milestone comics—with fan letters printed in the second issue of every new series—was a notable feat. Publishing comic books is a time-consuming, labor-intensive business.⁵ It takes more than four weeks to go from the sale of one issue of a comic book to the collection of letters from fans to the printing of those letters in a subsequent issue's letters column. Yet Milestone had the first issues of its comics for sale one week and letters about those issues in its letter columns just four weeks later. By way of preface to the fan letters column in this issue, "Iconography" explains how Milestone obtained responses to issue #1 of *Icon*:

Just as we did with our other titles, we went and distributed black and white copies of *ICON* #1 to various elements of the fan community, as well as some of the mysterious cyber-fans lurking on the Genie [*sic*] computer service.⁶

Black-and-white advance copies of *Icon* #1, and of Milestone's other titles, *Hardware*, *Static*, and *Blood Syndicate*, provided some fans with the grounds to weigh in on the debut issue of a new series before other readers even knew it existed. This advance marketing to generate buzz also contributes to the characterization of the "fan community" as a space where authors and audiences interact. One letter printed in *Icon* #2 comes from popular comics writer Kurt Busiek, who would later write *Icon* #11. The appearance of a letter from a popular professional writer lends credence to Milestone's early effort to situate itself in the industry. However, just as the appearance of Busiek's name associates the notion that fans can turn pro with the notion that professionals value fan activity, it also places would-be Milestone fans in the privileged company of industry insiders and early adopters, for example, the fans on GENie.⁷ When America Online eclipsed the bulletin board systems of services like Usenet and GENie, Milestone established an online presence along with industry stalwarts like Marvel and DC. *Icon*'s creator, Dwayne McDuffie, maintained an active

message board until the end of his life. Insofar as it placed letters from ordinary fans alongside those of industry professionals and early adopters, Milestone did not so much introduce itself to fandom as proclaim that it had already arrived. The letters page thus creates the appearance of a commercial venture that is also true to its “culture,” in the sense that it relies on an economy of knowledge driven by participants who are in the know. By inviting fans into this economy, Milestone engaged in a strategy of crossover and containment that would reverberate throughout its publications.⁸

Milestone encouraged fans to feel invested in its commercial success. Gestures to this effect cemented the place of its publications in the lower strata of the field of cultural production, where producers and consumers interact, like other works in the fantastic genres. Consumer enthusiasm can lead to professional success in publishing across genres, of course. Milestone’s president was a comics fan in his youth but grew up to be an executive editor at a business magazine. He followed a path somewhat similar to that of longtime DC Comics publisher Jenette Kahn, who had worked on children’s magazines before comics; she was publisher of DC Comics during its distribution of Milestone.⁹ Marvel head Joe Quesada created comics as an artist before attaining a leadership position in the last decade. Milestone also enjoyed the creative direction of Dwayne McDuffie and Denys Cowan, both of whom worked on comics for major publishers before and after Milestone’s run.

Milestone Media was neither the first nor the only Black-owned comics publisher in its time. Jeffrey Brown’s study of Milestone comics, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*, devotes considerable attention to the way Milestone was situated in the comics industry, and his interpretation is essential as we contemplate the way the company framed its strategies. Brown positions Milestone in relation to two comparable independent comics publishers from the 1990s, ANIA and Image Comics. With regard to the contrast between Milestone and ANIA, an independent consortium of Afrocentric comics creators, it was not only the political divergence between the two companies’ products but the question of Milestone’s creative independence, given its reliance on DC for distribution, that set the two companies apart.¹⁰ These questions turned out to be prescient; in one incident, Milestone and DC came into conflict over issues closely linked to developments in *Icon*. DC Comics refused to circulate the original cover of Milestone’s *Static* #25—this was years after the ANIA creators had made their accusations over Milestone’s compromised

status—because of the presence of condoms in the image, suggesting that Milestone characters might engage in nonprocreative, premarital sex. The cover was controversial in a way similar to an image of Rocket from one of *Icon*'s covers that I discuss subsequently. In both cases, the character in question is depicted in superhero costume with objects connotative of sex in the background; in Static's case, there are condoms; in Rocket's case, there is a home pregnancy test. Though I spare *Static* from further discussion in this essay, I note that the controversies of depicting Rocket's pregnancy and Static's nonprocreative sex figured prominently in the debate over Milestone's crossover potential.

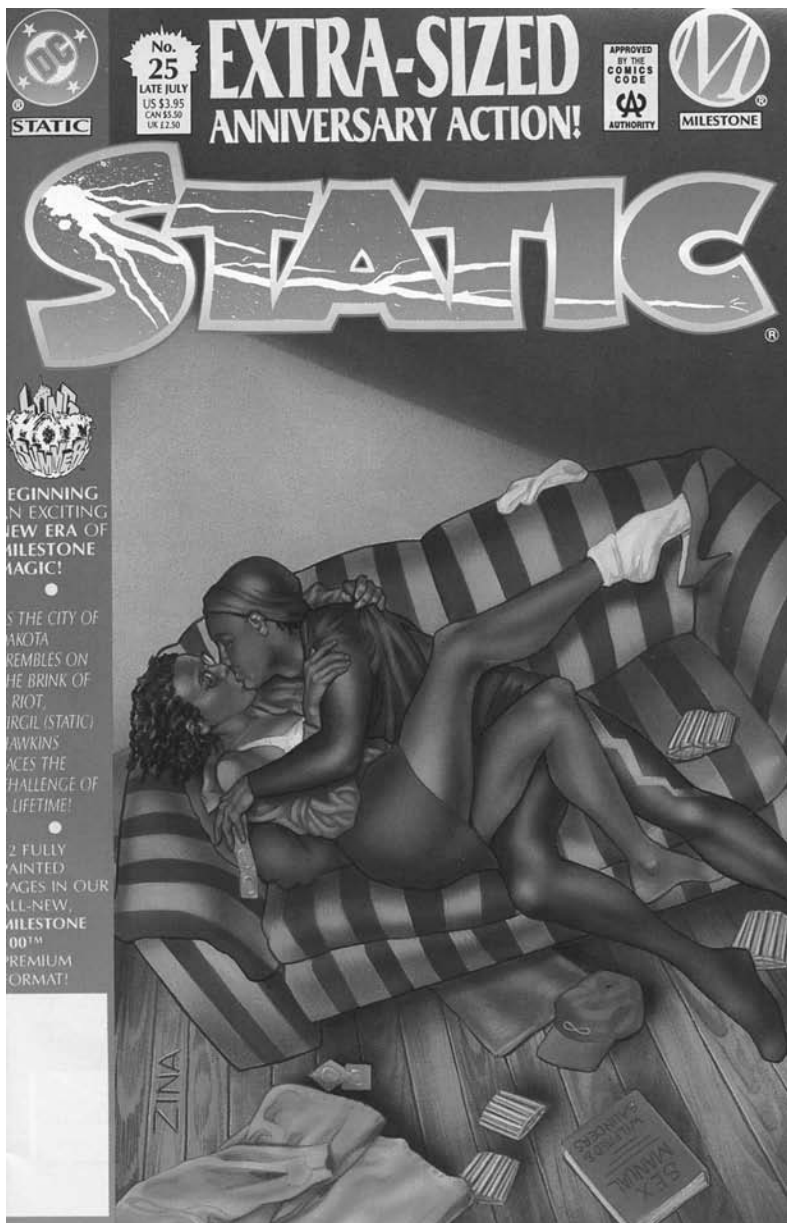
With respect to Image, the company founded by former Marvel comics artists in the early 1990s, some of whom authored works subsequently reabsorbed into major companies, Brown notes,

The Milestone stories are understood in contrast to the flashy, market-dominating comic books released by the various studios which fall under the publishing umbrella of Image Comics. Because Image is an artist-based publishing company, its comics are generally identifiable by their exaggeratedly stylized form of illustration . . . [whereas] the Milestone heroes have been cast in the mold of the most conventional superheroes of times past.¹¹

Brown's study also illustratively presents the notion of subcultural capital to describe how fan practices display the logic of the field of cultural production. In a similar vein, Matthew Pustz highlights how the interests of comics fans diverge from those of comic book collectors, noting how back issues of comic books become valuable collectibles in a way that reinserts the subculture into the market. These considerations demonstrate that popular genre publications, unlike their more venerated literary counterparts, do not quite turn the economic world upside-down but rather inside-out. The comics industry has, over time, accrued norms that translate into commercial success alongside internally specific modes of valuation. The letters page of *Icon* puts this double-faced value system on display. As both workplace and marketplace in the field of cultural production, the letters column is one site at which Milestone cultivates the cultural capital of the comics industry: audience response.

Cross-Cultural Capital

As editors continued to print and respond to letters within comics, they exercised their own status as professionals by organizing the representation



The original cover of *Static* #25 depicted young Black characters in an intimate embrace, with condoms visible in the image. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

of correspondence according to their publishers' interests. In exchange for the measure of influence conferred on fans whose letters appeared in print, the company utilized the fans' example to generate and sustain readership. In *Icon*, another practice that cultivated the audience as a resource was the invention of a credential for the best and brightest letter writers.

The very first issue of *Icon* available to the public had included the letters column titled "Iconography," but there were no letters yet. During the weeks in between the first issue of the first Milestone comic and the second issue of that first series, when letters appeared, the editors established a tradition. This process took advantage of the industry's standard distribution schedule. New comics arrive at retailers on Wednesdays, but if a comics company publishing multiple titles each month were to release all its new issues only on one Wednesday each month, there would be no new material to sustain the attention of fans and nothing new to entice potential consumers throughout the rest of the month. The staggered dates for the premiere of their first four titles allowed Milestone's editors to establish conventions over four weeks' time on the letters pages of their #1 issues. These customs included (1) Milestone's broadly welcoming and playfully brash voice soliciting readers' letters, (2) a set of interestingly titled letters columns, and (3) contests in which the readers could participate through letter writing.

A contest in the first issue of *Icon* promised that, as a reward for writing the definitive response to a question about the series, one reader would win a prize and earn a title. The question was as follows:

Is this comic book about Augustus Freeman IV, marooned space alien, or Raquel Ervin, budding writer in a rough neighborhood, or both?¹²

The author of the winning response to this question would receive the fame of having her answer printed in a future issue of *Icon*; a signed edition of *Icon* #1; a signed Milestone ball cap; and, to commemorate the winner's title as "Cross-Cultural Diplomat," her choice of either Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* or W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.

The particular prizes offered by Milestone indicate that the cross-cultural dimension of this contest, and by extension, the story of *Icon*, is not, fundamentally, a matter of reconciling Raquel Ervin's realistic concerns as a young Black woman with the ostensibly alien milieu of superheroes, advanced technology, and extraterrestrial life. Elsewhere in the book, I have identified that formulation as "the Whiteness of science fiction."

Instead, *Icon* represents a rendition of the speculative fiction of Blackness: for Augustus Freeman (whose original name is Arnus), humanity and Blackness alike are constructed, technologically mediated experiences. Within this experience of shared humanity, within Blackness, Augustus still sits across a cultural divide from Raquel. The meanings of Blackness for Augustus and Raquel, symbolized by the value of Du Bois's and Washington's respective texts, diverge on the basis of class, education, gender, and other earthbound differences rather than on qualities that can be mapped onto genre distinctions. Thus a Cross-Cultural Diplomat must think critically about Blackness to appraise the difference between the two protagonists of *Icon*. Although Augustus's superhuman abilities establish fantastic possibilities in the story, the distinction the contest asks readers to recognize is between Du Bois and Washington: between one rendition of Blackness and another, rather than between Du Bois and Isaac Asimov, or Washington and Harlan Ellison, as if to distinguish speculative fiction from Blackness.

The winner of the Cross-Cultural Diplomat competition was one Gina Williams of Aiea, Hawai'i. She earns acclaim from Milestone's president (who judged the contest) for expressing in terms the column calls "eloquent" her interpretation of why the series is about both heroes, *Icon* and *Rocket*, "as seen through the eyes and told through the voice of *Rocket*."¹³ Crucially, Derek Dingle commends Williams's letter for recognizing, in addition to its apt characterization of the series's narrative, that "an underlying objective of *ICON* was to show the diversity of lifestyles and political thought in the African American community. One of the major thrusts of Milestone," he says, "besides making good comics with solid story lines and spectacular art—is to show the different layers of the multicultural society we live in." In "captur[ing] the essence of the book," according to Dingle, Williams's letter appraises the confluence of *Icon*'s and *Rocket*'s respective points of view as the primary focus of the series. In her words, this composite perspective "shows a unity between Black Americans regardless of social status and background."

Williams refers to precedents within and outside of the superhero genre for *Rocket*'s role as a narrator:

From *SUPERMAN* and Lois Lane to *THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER*, practically every hero has a star journalist somewhere in the background. That's where Raquel comes in. Unlike any other sidekick, she is more prominent because she is a symbol of aspiration among our youth. She is diplomatic in bridging two

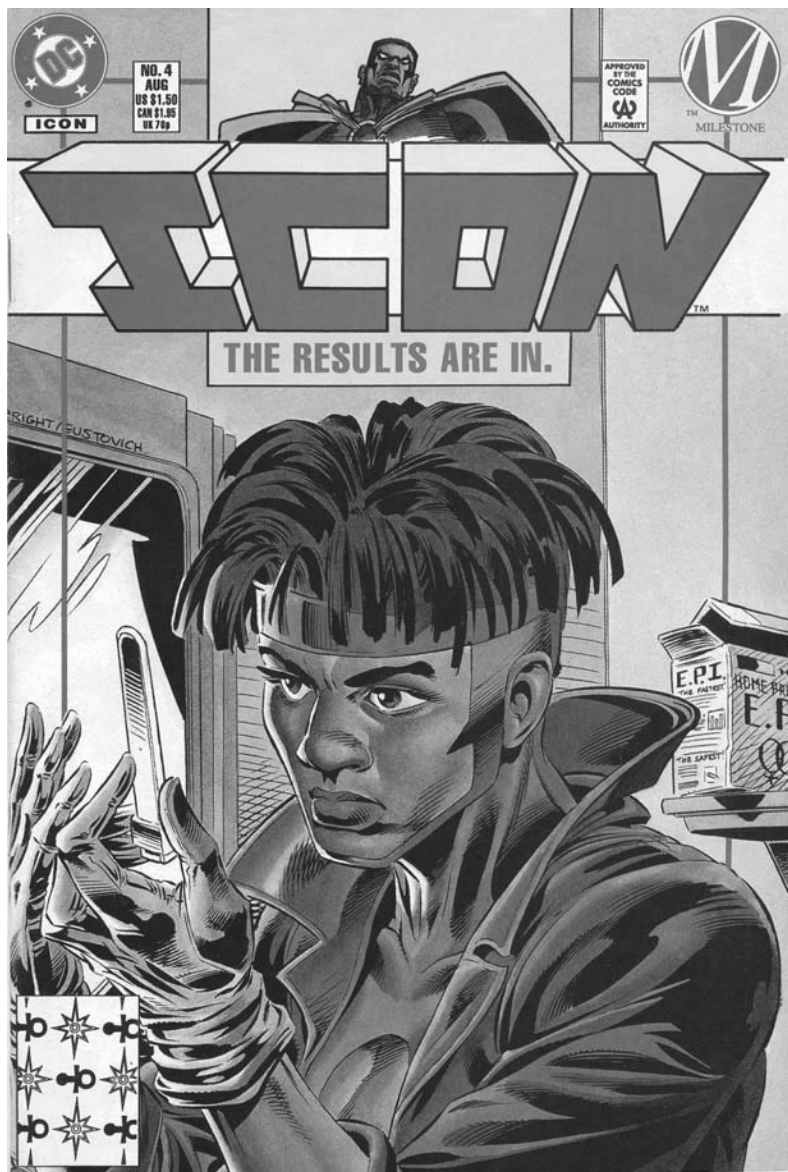
styles of Black American culture. . . . Raquel's writing plays a major role because it's the writer who tells the story. By reading her work, we see what makes her tick and it makes her character more human than any other hero's helper.

Williams's response is a prime example of how the letters page set a stage on which *Icon* would position Raquel at the center of the series's strategy for working across literary and paraliterary standards of cultural value. Staging the confrontation between different interpretations of *Icon* as a question of whether Icon, Rocket, or both were the focus of the title limits the debate over the cross-cultural reach of the series to matters of character point of view and narrative technique, which are differences within texts about Blackness and within SF texts rather than differences between the two. These parameters emphatically leave the question of choosing between Black or White readers, or choosing to appeal to science fiction enthusiasts or nonfans, off the table.

Rewarding Williams for emphasizing the way *Icon* exploits the genre conventions of journalist and sidekick already in place in superhero comics and the way the series inflects those conventions with Raquel's perspective is a strategic choice. By insisting that Raquel's writing is what makes the series legible to readers, the letters page portrays investment in Raquel's perspective as a prerequisite to understanding the superhero narrative. Editors and publishers exercise a great deal of influence over the role fan correspondence plays in comics, because they choose what appears and what to say about it. With the example of the Cross-Cultural Diplomat contest, that influence extends to the role comic book readers will play in negotiating with questions of race through popular culture. To understand the far-reaching ambitions of Milestone's intervention on the wider landscape of popular media, and the role fan letters played in this endeavor, I turn next to the matter of Rocket's controversial decision in the early issues of *Icon*: in the following discussion, I examine the insights that the letters page of *Icon* offers into the spectacle of politicizing Black women's sexual autonomy.

Rocket's Decision

At the end of *Icon* #3, in a scene depicting the moments after Icon and Rocket have saved the city, Icon has a startling revelation for Raquel and for the reader: she's pregnant. Icon can already tell, through his superhuman



On the cover of *Icon* #4, the protagonist, in costume as her superhero alter ego Rocket, holds a home pregnancy test. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

heightened senses. The page facing this one is the letters column. Praise for the series dominates among the four letters printed this month. The only reference to the events of this issue is a small picture in the bottom right corner with the caption, “ROCKET learns the awful truth! ‘MOM’S GONNA KILL ME,’ in ONE MONTH.”¹⁴ That picture is a miniature version of the next issue’s cover featuring Rocket, in her costume, holding what discerning readers will recognize as a home pregnancy test.

In the following issue, Raquel delivers on the promise of the cover. Under the tantalizing heading “THE RESULTS ARE IN,” Raquel is wearing her costume, alone, with the object she’s holding identified with the box that reads, suggestively, “E.P.I. HOME PREG—,” cut off by the cover’s edge. The sensational cover prompts the uninitiated reader to ask, “Is this young woman with a pregnancy test . . . a superhero? Is this superhero . . . pregnant?” The letters page in this issue asks: “IS THIS NORMAL?”

Do superheroes get pregnant? At 15? Not until now, they didn’t. There’s a whole lot of reality out there, and we thought it might be nice to bring it into our pages. SOME 15 year-olds do get pregnant (usually 15-year old GIRLS) and not all of them are stupid or sluts. We all make mistakes. Now that Raquel got herself into this situation, what will she do?¹⁵

Despite the shock of the previous issue and the sobering confirmation of this one, the content of the letters page is silent on the issue, because reactions have not yet come in. The letters that appear are runners-up in the Cross-Cultural Diplomat contest. The controversy seems to have faded from view. Unlike the previous month’s column, nothing else on this letters page indicates that readers will learn more about Raquel’s pregnancy in the next issue.

On the cover of *Icon* #4, Raquel is depicted as a superhero, in her costume, holding the pregnancy test. Within the issue, however, Raquel and her best friend, Darnice, purchase the test at a local pharmacy in their ordinary clothes. Before we find out the results, the issue tells the story of Icon uncovering a conspiracy involving Dakota’s superheroes and supervillains; the hero flies across the city searching for the truth. The cover utilizes one frame to perform what the issue’s contents achieve by representing different situations across space and time: juxtaposing spectacular superheroics with everyday life. Juxtaposition, Scott McCloud explains in his much-lauded *Understanding Comics*, forms the basic visual syntax of the medium. The layout of panels on the comics page conveys their logical, sometimes chronological sequence, and it also determines the



In *Icon* #4, the protagonist and her best friend, Darnice, contemplate the results of Raquel's home pregnancy test. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

mood and pacing of events depicted throughout the text. There is also another form of juxtaposition at work in the situation portrayed in *Icon* #4. This gesture bends the rules of comic book imagery to the story's aims even as it relies on them.

The editor's rhetorical question at the start of *Icon* #4's letters column ("IS THIS NORMAL?") suggests that Raquel's pregnancy is a break with the usual fare of superhero comics in deference to "reality." Though most readers would recognize what superhero costumes look like, they genuinely might not recognize a home pregnancy test. Others might be concerned at the sight of a young Black woman with a pregnancy test, but they might find it unusual to see an illustration (not a photograph) of such a woman wearing a mask and gloves, under the masthead of a comic book. Milestone's founders anticipated occasions like this in which audiences with differing frames of reference would share a reading experience. In a 1993 interview, Dwayne McDuffie faces a question about different groups of readers: "But you want to reach folks who aren't already reading comics. Isn't the reason they're not reading comics basically because of the fact that they don't have much of an appetite for the superhero genre?" In his reply, McDuffie insists that readers who take an interest in Milestone because of their identification with the characters would become fans only if they were impressed with the content:

No one's going to say, "I'm not reading comic books because there are too many darn superheroes, and gosh darnit, I wish they were doing something alternative for me!" They don't think about us! I mean, we're a pimple on the media's ass. People are completely unaware. If they see a character who looks interesting because, "Hey, that character looks like me," they will pick it up. They don't know superheroes, they don't know much about comics, but they'll pick it up and they'll read it and decide whether or not they want to read another one.¹⁶

In *Icon* #4, the commonplace adventure of two teenage girls dealing with the facts of life gives way to the exploits of a superhero dressed like the woman on the cover. After his day job as an attorney, Icon confronts a carjacker, a conspiracy-minded client, rumors about a mysterious chemical that threatens the public, and a terrified reporter whom readers might recognize from another Milestone title, *Blood Syndicate*. (Later I discuss the appearance of a character from another comic as an example of crossover.) Given its plot, however, *Icon* #4 is at least equal parts science fiction and detective story, like many superhero comics. Unlike other superhero

comics, however, it has broached the topic of teen pregnancy and thereby acknowledged that the hero's sidekick is a sexually active woman. The content of the issue emplots pregnancy within a superhero narrative through juxtaposition, through its serial form; it is building suspense over time, answering some questions in this installment of the text while deferring others until subsequent weeks and months. This issue's introduction to the letters column suggests that despite relying on storytelling techniques that are typical for the superhero subgenre, the series has brought together elements of the normal with the abnormal through its subject matter, but what normative system of representation has *Icon* broken with: representing superheroes, or representing teen pregnancy?

In an interview with Milestone's founders for *The Comics Journal*, Tony Norman questions whether their comics fit into the superhero genre. "Is it possible," he asks, "that a comic book devoted to social realism, without the introduction of fantasmagoria or science fiction, can make it in the mainstream?"

[DENYS] COWAN: I don't know. Somebody will do it if it can be done, but we're not doing that yet.

NORMAN: Do you ever get the sense that people are looking towards you to do that, and, if they are disappointed, that might be the reason?

[DEREK] DINGLE: I've certainly gotten that sense in this interview.

When Cowan insists, "We're not doing that," he is reminding Norman and potential readers that Milestone comics are quite full of "fantasmagoria and science fiction." Dingle further scrutinizes Norman's leading question, indicating that the framing of critics, rather than the content of the material Milestone publishes, is the source of doubts about whether comics can feature Blackness as well as science fiction. McDuffie, Cowan, Dingle, and most fans hold Milestone's comics to the standards of the superhero genre by establishing distance between the world of their comics and the "reality" or "social realism," and when the real world does encroach on their pages, they frame it as an imposition to reassure their readers that speculative fiction is still the context of the story.

Between issues #4 and #10 of *Icon*, the letters page continues to attenuate concerns about how disruptive Raquel's pregnancy might be while underscoring the story's commonalities with other superhero narratives:

Y'know, if you only put a teenager with a home pregnancy test on the cover of a comic book, the letters will just pour in. The response to *ICON* #4 has

got to be up there with the Silver Age gimmick of putting a really fat Superman or Lois Lane on the cover; the image is instantly intriguing. Don't be surprised if other companies start picking up on this, and twenty different pregnancy-test covers show up at once!¹⁷

This jocular aside suspends consideration of the content of *Icon* #4 and refers to its cover, associating it not with the controversial developments



The scene of controversy: in *Icon* #7, the protagonist and her doctor discuss the choice Raquel faces about whether to terminate her pregnancy. They share an understanding that discussing abortion could jeopardize the clinic's federal funding at that time. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

of the present but with the low-rent marketing gimmicks of a bygone era in comics history. The tongue-in-cheek comparison between pregnant Raquel and fat Superman appears still more irreverent when it invokes the “Silver Age,” a term for the now-classic superhero comics that ushered in the third quarter of the twentieth century. These gestures draw readers’ attention away from the content of the issue they have just read and back to the covers of comics past and present. The impertinence of the letters column is particularly dissonant, because in this issue, Raquel has undergone a decisive test at a doctor’s office. Now that her pregnancy has been confirmed, she receives advice about her options.

Several significant rhetorical maneuvers take place in the scene where Raquel talks with a doctor about the possibility of terminating her pregnancy. As the scene proceeds, the doctor utilizes medically appropriate terminology that does not often appear in superhero comics. She explains that the test Raquel has undergone detects an organ (the placenta) and not a viable fetus, she names the specific termination procedure that Raquel might undertake, and she advises Raquel that she is a matter of “weeks” pregnant, eschewing the more colloquial month-to-month chronology. Writers and critics of science fiction would call this “hard science,” were it not also the rhetoric of women’s health. Narrating the decision that precipitates a crying Rocket on the cover of the issue in such coldly analytical rhetoric and medicalizing the protagonist in this fashion seems to disrupt any preconceived notions about Augustus’s extraterrestrial, high-tech, superpowered qualities as the basis for the series’s identification with the science fiction genre, on one hand, and Raquel’s purposively feminine, sentimental quality as a departure from it, on the other.

Another layer of rhetoric this scene invokes is the regulation of access to medical information. As with other areas of scientific knowledge, asymmetries of information have historically mystified women’s own knowledge of their sexual autonomy. This dilemma is all too poignant for Black women like Raquel, who have struggled with a legacy of sterilization and exploitation of their reproductive capacity. When the doctor says, “This is a government-funded clinic. It’s illegal for me to tell you what I’m going to,” she is ventriloquizing a prevailing interpretation of the Public Health Service Act, affirmed in the 1991 Supreme Court case *Rust v. Sullivan*. Despite numerous challenges, it was illegal to dispense advice about abortion in federally funded family planning clinics in the United States prior to Bill Clinton lifting the domestic gag rule by executive order in January 1993. There is a discrepancy between the discursive regime under which

real doctors were operating at the end of 1993, when *Icon* #7 was published, and what the doctor communicates to Raquel. Although the issue has a cover date of November 1993, it was conceptualized and illustrated some time earlier; this is a reminder that comics take time to produce and to consume, and the time of reading may lag behind or recall the time of art, law, and science. This minor anachronism, which has sobering implications for Raquel's conversation with her doctor but is not, strictly speaking, a reflection of "reality" at the time of the issue's publication, renders *Icon* a compelling departure from real life in the time and place where the text circulates. Thus I would argue that a close reading of this scene in its context makes it all the more pertinent to situate Milestone comics within the idiom of speculative fiction, as they portray circumstances that do not correspond directly to a journalistic, historical, or otherwise realist rendition of African American life at the end of the twentieth century.

When Raquel asks, "What if I don't want to have the baby?" her conversation with her doctor moves into an alternative discursive space. Raquel and her doctor's conversation could not take place—the clinic would lose access to federal funds—if the doctor's reference to abortion became known. The organization of the comics page enables the reader to witness the reconfiguration of this space in a way that makes such transgressive speech possible. In the grammar of the English-language comics page, a panel on the left signifies the past vis-à-vis a panel on the right, and a panel at the top of the page signifies the past relative to a panel at the bottom. In *Icon* #7, the doctor and Raquel step out of the past, in which they have occupied a space governed by certain norms, to compose a narrative about the future, a veritable speculative fiction: "It's illegal for me to tell you what I'm going to." The future arrives following Rocket's decision to suspend her disbelief and entertain a wider range of possibilities about her life. Raquel assents to participate in a conversation that violates the laws of the space in which she has heretofore existed—a space shaped by structural forces but not wholly determined by them. Instead of reproducing these limitations on her subjectivity by obeying the law, the doctor invites her to join her in becoming a new kind of woman. The characters' subject positions do not cease to exist when they appear in the strange negative space on the page. Instead, the setting temporarily changes in a fashion that the medium of comics makes available. Raquel brings the reader into a new space governed by a set of rules that bends the law and prevailing social norms ("Do superheroes get pregnant? At 15?") but does not break them ("Not until now, they didn't").



Rocket's decision: confounded by a pledge of unconditional support from Augustus, despite his conservative political beliefs, Raquel strikes him and admits that she has decided to carry her pregnancy to term. From *Icon* #7. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

At the end of *Icon* #7, Raquel sheepishly asks Augustus for a gift of money, but she does not intend to use it to pay for an abortion. She does not expect him to understand: "You're not poor. You're not a woman. You could never understand the kind of decision I'm trying to make." Unexpectedly, he reveals that his preternaturally long life has afforded him experiences that allow him to empathize with Raquel. Augustus subsequently tells her about his late wife Estelle's decision, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to terminate her pregnancy rather than attempt to bear his child. The circumstances were extraordinary, among narratives about abortion, but understandable, when we recall that *Icon* is a story about an extraterrestrial superhero. Owing to Augustus's alien genotype, Estelle's fetus was not viable; even though abortions were costly and illegal in the time and place the couple lived, the pregnancy was much more dangerous to her health. After relating this tale, Augustus says, "I cannot put myself in your place, I cannot tell you what to do. If you need the money, take it. It is a gift. Whatever you decide, I am your friend." Then, Rocket slaps his glasses off his face. She's having that baby.

In the early stages of Rocket's decision, the outcome of Raquel's pregnancy remained open to interpretation. Fan correspondence questioned what was going to happen, but it was merely speculation. Fans with differing opinions about Rocket's decision would eventually have their say on the letters page, but only after Rocket's decision was fully articulated within the text by the preceding events. Readers who took exception to the story as it unfolded could express their discontent, but the conflicts driving the plot were already resolved, from the protagonist's point of view. Their letters would have no bearing on the course of events. Fans may ultimately decide the fate of a publication, as consumers, but printing their positive and negative responses on the letters page only underscores the fact that their stake in the production of the text is limited.

Quixotic/Heroic/Message/Comics

In the letters column of *Icon* #10, a picture of *Icon* #7's cover precedes the editor's introductory remarks, indicating that the letters printed in the column would address the revelations of the foregoing issue. The editor writes, "We received a lot of mail after Rocket made her decision. The following is a good representation of the comments we got."¹⁸ Three letters follow. The one recognized as the "Letter of the Month" comes from a reader who identifies himself as "King Solomon." The pseudonym King

Solomon, of course, invokes the biblical parable about the king who proposed, in an ironic expression of his wisdom, that two women divided over custody of a child resolve a dispute by dividing the baby in two. The author of the Letter of the Month commends *Icon* #7 as “a well done exploration of the abortion issue, taking care not to be too slanted toward the pro-choicers or the anti-choicers.” An alternative interpretation comes from a reader named Kate Murray:

To the extent that this is a “message” comic—and just by existing as a hero comic in an urban black setting, it sends a message—“Rocket’s Decision” is an enormous sellout. Are we still in that dark age of storytelling where no positive character ever opts for abortion (except in a life-threatening pregnancy) and even bringing the subject up requires sentimental speeches. . . . Real girls in Rocket’s position who duplicate her choice are buying into a life of misery. You have presented, very effectively, all the reasons why she should not have this child. Now you show her choosing to do so as a quixotic, heroic thing. . . . I cannot tolerate your offering a “hero” character who would make such a stupid, sentimental, short-sighted decision, which in real life would mean drudgery, poverty, and living death for two individuals. . . . Thanks for setting up the kind of role model that perpetuates the cycle of poverty and keeps women in economic and psychological slavery.

In the *Comics Journal* interview with Milestone’s leadership, Denys Cowan addressed the assertion Murray makes in his response to Tony Norman’s question, “Are there things in these books that you would say are purposefully written on the level of propaganda that is supposed to change people’s minds?”

[DENYS] COWAN: You mean “message” comics?

[TONY] NORMAN: Yeah.

ALL: Nope.

COWAN: These are not message comics. If there’s any message, it’s that they’re good comics.¹⁹

There is nothing in *Icon* that its creators would say is purposefully written on the level of propaganda, nothing that would characterize their work as message comics in a political sense. But Kate Murray insists that “just by existing as a hero comic in an urban Black setting,” *Icon* sends a message. By conferring a modicum of cultural capital on King Solomon’s even-handed response, the editors signify that the letters page is a venue in which “a good representation” of fan opinion can occur. Within the

hierarchy established under King Solomon's "comparably balanced" appraisal, therefore, Kate Murray's interpretation appears as an extreme and therefore less valuable view. The other contribution to this column's "good representation," and the other extreme contrast to King Solomon's letter, comes from one Michael Dlugozima, who complains that "a bias toward abortion permeates this entire issue" based on the doctor and Icon's refusal to advise Raquel against getting an abortion. Take Dlugozima's letter as evidence that Milestone's editorial strategy depends neither on the message that abortion is a reasonable option for any pregnant woman to consider nor on the message that abortion is an inadvisable, morally questionable practice. The letters column only appears to occasion a debate over the political implications of Rocket's decision. In my view, the text tends to convey the notion that abortion is a perfectly legitimate choice entitled to legal protection through the story. More importantly, however, the message communicated by recognizing King Solomon's as the Letter of the Month is that readers are always—and only—invited to debate whether the writers, illustrators, and editors of *Icon* have performed their job well in aesthetic terms. Including readers as arbiters of cultural value is a tradition in the speculative fiction genres, and *Icon* is no different. The possibility that we would position the mass audience as interpreters of the political efficacy of this story, I argue, stems from the conventions of evaluating cultural production by and about Black Americans.

Dlugozima's and Murray's letters assert that there is a consequential message, a real-world import, to any "hero comic in an urban Black setting." Lest we assume this disposition is unique to comics fandom, or to Milestone readers, we should take heed of how well traveled this notion has become in American culture. The misconception that Black people are somehow "more real" or inherently more fascinating than White people, even in situations where the two are equally fictitious, is a widespread problem for antirealist Black artists and critical interpreters of Black culture. Discomfiting suggestions about Milestone comics offering a "message" indicate that commentary on superhero comics should place a premium on questions of verisimilitude, which is a counterintuitive point of departure for interpreting works in the SF tradition. Yet this counterintuitive tendency echoes throughout considerations of Blackness in other fields of contemporary cultural criticism. In *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*, Madhu Dubey advises the reader to note how critics exploit "realistic" images of Black American life in stereotypical

ways, even as the same scholars characterize the postmodern condition as one that requires us to question all our other assumptions about what is taken for granted as “real” in the present world:

Even as black urban culture is exuberantly exploited to feed global commodity capitalism, mass-media and academic debates cast the black urban poor as the catalysts of social and cultural crisis. If we look farther afield, at technological or semiotic accounts of postmodernism, we still find African-Americans appearing as the flashpoints of crisis. A random but telling example is Scott Lash and John Urry’s book *Economies of Signs and Space*, which argues the now-familiar thesis that “economic and symbolic processes are more than ever interlaced” in the postmodern era. Lash and Urry assert that the “real loser” in such a context is “the single black mother in the Chicago ghetto,” who lacks the cultural capital that increasingly mediates access to economic and political power.²⁰

In other words, scholarly perspectives on the lives of Black people, who are disproportionately impoverished in economic terms, assume that these populations are culturally “impoverished” as well, bereft of critical resources. The familiar specificity of “the Chicago ghetto” in Lash and Urry’s anecdote underscores the flaw Dubey finds in contemporary critics’ line of reasoning. The prototypical single Black mother in their example could just as well live in Raquel Ervin’s hometown of Dakota, because she isn’t a real person. She is an artifact of the way trained scholars and comics fans—groups who are separated by a gulf of cultural capital—think in the same terms about Blackness, gender, sexuality, and contemporary urban life.

Contrary to the expectations of the most and least educated members of the public, Rocket’s decision features Raquel reconciling the demands of performing the role of a superhero with those of performing the role of a young Black woman with limited means by disputing foregone conclusions about her station in life. She achieves this not by any native cunning but through the strategic attainment and deployment of knowledge (from her doctor, also a woman of color, and from Icon, by way of his late wife, another Black woman). Crucially, Raquel tells the story in *Icon*, and the artwork represents her doing so through the storytelling mechanisms of comics. Far from being the “real loser” in a tragic anecdote of urban decay, she is the mother to a new visual rhetoric and sexual politics that extend, but do not break with, the postmodern condition in culture.

The process of telling Rocket’s story demands work and time, as well as a well-developed critical frame of reference informed by a self-reflexive

analysis of the field of cultural production. Raquel begins articulating such a critique in her first words to the reader in *Icon* #1: "I've always wanted to be a writer, like Toni Morrison." Her boyfriend cajoled her into going to rob the house where she would meet Augustus Freeman for the first time by remarking, "Besides, we have a good night, maybe we'll make enough money for you to get yourself a typewriter." In response, Raquel thought, "I'll bet Toni Morrison has a typewriter." When Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature, the letters page noted,

Raquel Ervin is thrilled to announce that ROCKET'S FAVORITE WRITER, TONI MORRISON, recently won the NOBEL PRIZE in literature. We don't usually go around claiming that one of our fictional characters is thrilled, but you KNOW she is. Talk about inspiring others with your heroic deeds! Ms. Morrison is perhaps the best living writer in the English language. Raquel suggests that if you haven't read any of her books, go check one out RIGHT THIS MINUTE!²¹

Morrison is an icon for Raquel and for literary critics, as well. Toni Morrison exemplifies the way contemporary Black authors negotiate with critics who display an overweening appetite for truth in Black writing, even in fiction. Madhu Dubey notes,

Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the postmodern moment is that it witnesses the greatest effusion ever of print literature by African-Americans, along with a disavowal of their chosen medium by some of the most celebrated of these authors. Toni Morrison, for example, has said that she imagines her ideal audience to be "an illiterate or preliterate reader." One of my aims in writing *Signs and Cities* is to account for this paradox whereby the most prolific African-American authors feel compelled to present their works as something other than print literature.²²

The first time readers meet Raquel, they see her through her writing. The first time she introduces Augustus to the idea of *Icon* and the Rocket, she approaches him with her arms full of books. Readers finally learn the definitive story of Augustus's extraterrestrial origin when Raquel sits down to write about the discovery. At the beginning of the issue where those revelations take place, Raquel makes the expository function of her writing explicit by stating, in her notebook, "I'm writing a book. I call it *Icon*. But the truth of the matter is, I don't know *Icon*'s real story. It don't matter, though. This book is about me."²³ The first time she saw Augustus fly, what did Raquel do? She compared the experience to reading *Song of Solomon*.²⁴



In *Icon* #1, Raquel dreams of becoming an author, "like Toni Morrison," while living in a housing project and unable to afford a typewriter. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.



In *Icon* #1, the protagonist approaches Augustus Freeman with her arms full of books with the hope of persuading him to use his superhuman abilities to inspire the people of their city as a superhero. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

The book-within-the-book that Raquel is writing, because it is coextensive with the comics series *Icon*, imagines Rocket herself as its ideal audience—aspiring writer, not preliterate reader. Her position is more analogous to that of an SF fan thinking of “going pro” than that of an alienated subaltern on the outside of the social groups whose experience is represented in the literary field. Thus *Icon* appears to lodge a different critique of the modern cultural world from that of much contemporary Black American literature by highlighting how Raquel’s experiences lend themselves to writing in a different genre from the cultural works that typically represent Black Americans, rather than with a different form of expression altogether.

Crossover: A Partial View

Although Toni Morrison looms large among *Icon*’s influences, it’s Zora Neale Hurston whom Raquel invokes during the “Long, Hot Summer” event as she thinks about what will happen to her community in the future. The “Long, Hot Summer” was a crossover, a comics industry event wherein the characters and developments from one series appear in issues of another. The plot of a crossover often requires readers to purchase more than one title to follow its sequence of events. In the “Long, Hot Summer” (which occurred shortly after Raquel had given birth in *Icon*), all of Milestone’s then expanded line of titles featured parts of an interconnected set of stories about the construction of an amusement park called Utopia in the fictitious city of Dakota. Utopia Park displaced residents, employed superheroes as security, and collapsed in fire at the end. The “Long, Hot Summer” was Milestone’s third company-wide crossover. The first of these, “Shadow War,” brought together its four original titles and launched two new series, *Shadow Cabinet* and *Xombi*. The second, “Worlds Collide,” was an intercompany affair that involved issues of DC Comics titles featuring Superman. Jeffrey Brown discusses “Worlds Collide” and its implications for comparisons between *Icon* and Superman in *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*. The “Long, Hot Summer” and “Shadow War,” situated at the beginning and the middle of Milestone’s publishing history, respectively, offer us a chance to observe how Rocket’s perspective in *Icon* functions as a window onto the rest of the Milestone universe.

The events of “Shadow War” took place over the course of several weeks, with one issue of each of the six different series telling part of a story that revealed how people in Milestone’s fictitious city of Dakota gained their

superpowers. “The Company Line,” an editorial page printed in all of Milestone’s comics, featured a celebratory recap of the events in the Milestone universe to date on the occasion of Milestone’s fortieth comic book, *Shadow Cabinet* #0:

Hopefully, the gimmicks and buzz surrounding SHADOW WAR, our first MILESTONE-wide crossover, will snare us a new reader or two. Maybe some Walter Simonson fans will drop dead over his six drop-dead covers. A collector or two might find the silver ink on those covers a sound investment. The new paper on the two zero-numbered books could entice people who want something that looks arty and expensive for their coffee tables. A macaw or a cockatoo might be attracted by the brilliant shine of the UV-coated covers.²⁵

The crossover warranted the same brand of tongue-in-cheek commentary regarding the business of comics, tempered by a genuine effort to succeed commercially, that readers had seen with the company’s debut. As an occasion for self-conscious marketing, a crossover generates hype that bleeds into several titles at once, encouraging consumers to pick up all of the comics relevant to the unfolding story even if they do not already read the other series involved. The Milestone–DC event “Worlds Collide,” for example, was a demanding and expensive read; it took place over two months in Milestone’s titles and in four titles from DC. Its fast-paced plot tacitly assumed that readers would buy several comics every week to keep up with rapidly changing developments. “Worlds Collide” promised to help Milestone achieve crossover in more ways than one: in part, it aimed to make readers of the Superman titles from DC Comics into Milestone readers by creating a situation in which events depicted in Milestone comics had consequences for DC comics.

Perhaps to ease the entry of DC fans into Milestone readership, “The Company Line” printed a summary of the comics Milestone had published at the time of the “Worlds Collide” event. They had grown from forty issues at the time of “Shadow War” to seventy-six issues. This time, a contradictory note mocking the practice of marketing comics as collectors’ items and speculating on their future resale value accompanied the checklist:

Speculation on “hot” comics is a mug’s game. Once those spec-losers thought about it for a second, they blew outta there. Now, there’s nobody left but readers who want quality stories and art.²⁶

At the time, industry organs like the *Overstreet Comics Buyer's Guide* and lists at the back of *Wizard* magazine figured prominently in a vogue for comic book collecting. By consulting these guides, readers could find out what back issues of comics might garner a high price on the market and what features of certain comics might provide for sound investments in the future. Silver ink on covers played a part in that trend, as did the identification of elusive issues featuring the first appearances of popular characters. For good measure, Milestone identified the first appearances of its characters in the "Company Line" checklist that accompanied its August 1994 "Worlds Collide" issues, highlighting items that might promise high resale values in the future to justify high cover prices in the present. Curiously, the crossover provided a sounding board for competing priorities: a reassertion of aesthetics, on one hand, and a double-voiced overture to commercialism, on the other.

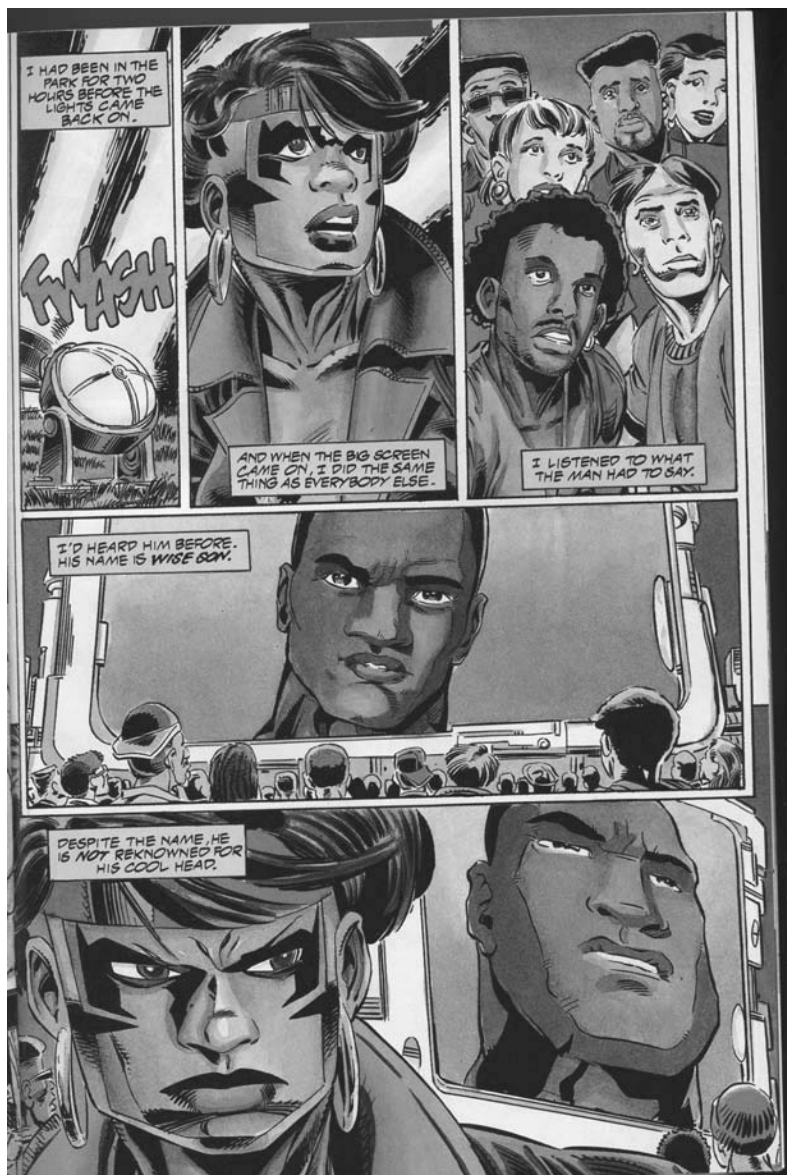
The "Long, Hot Summer" followed a marketing strategy like Milestone's other crossovers. The first issue of a limited series, *The Long Hot Summer* #1, featured a sparkling cover depicting characters from many of Milestone's titles. Over the course of three months, fan letters published in the columns of all Milestone's titles were recognized as "Letters of the Month," awarded signed copies of the issues in which they were printed. On the outside, the crossover traded in the traditional economic and cultural capital of superhero comics: visual spectacle, print quality, and originality. Reading *Icon*, however, should make it abundantly clear that covers and letters pages offer only a partial view of how superhero comics fit into and cross over the categories that operate in the field of cultural production. I began this chapter with Rocket's words on the occasion of the "Long, Hot Summer" because they raise the question that was my point of departure for this chapter: how could Raquel be *Icon*'s biggest fan, the one who invented him, when she appeared to be an outsider to the historical community drawn into science fiction and comics? The "Long, Hot Summer" was a crossover within the boundaries of the superhero comics genre, but it was also an occasion to reflect on the "crossover" appeal of Milestone's contribution to the superhero and SF traditions. The construction of Utopia Park in the city of Dakota staged conventional developments from the SF genre in a diverse, contemporary setting peopled by Black Americans—a setting typically invoked through realist modes of representation.

Many of Dakota's fictitious residents look forward to the opportunities heralded by the construction of Utopia Park, but Raquel is not one of

them. She is not alone in her displeasure, as her family is one of many facing eviction to make way for new development. The superpowered gang members depicted in Milestone's series *Blood Syndicate* become drawn into the crossover when the city attempts to use the park as a pretext to remove the criminal element by force. In *Icon*, the earthbound narrative about gentrification set in motion by the park's construction also gives way to a more fantastic subplot. Augustus finally makes contact with his home planet after many years of effort, and he discovers that his advanced civilization has been observing Earth from space. Readers learn that Icon comes from a powerful, harmonious, but judgmental interplanetary collective, and they look disapprovingly on the shortcomings of the human race. Upon learning that his people will decide the fate of humanity based on the success or failure of the ambitious Utopia Park, Icon decides he will do his best to portray the spectacle as evidence that humanity is essentially good.

As the beloved hero of Dakota, Icon becomes a spokesman for the park's supporters, but this puts him into conflict with his down-to-earth sidekick. Raquel, along with the rest of the city's displaced working class, starts to accuse Icon of being a sellout. Yet the failure of the park under its own excesses gives Icon cause for reflection. It reminds him, as Raquel had once before, that the people of Earth need him as an inspiration and a hero more than he needs to sit in judgment over them according to the ideals of another world. They reconcile in order to save the lives of Dakota's people as the park goes up in flames. Later, Raquel would come to understand Icon's embrace of Utopia. She journeys with him into space and witnesses that advanced technologies and infinite resources have made every member of Icon's civilization free from want, cosmopolitan, and virtually immortal: "No wonder you were in favor of Utopia Park," she says. "You used to live there."²⁷

Icon #29 saw Icon and Rocket working together to quell the rebellion at Utopia Park and suppress the violent overreach of the authorities, including superhuman police run amok. The rebellion only ends, however, when a superpowered gang member, from Milestone's series *Blood Syndicate*, gives an introspective speech to the crowd. To read the speech that the character named Wise Son gives, which stops Icon and Rocket in their tracks and inspires the crowd to lay down arms, you would have to read *Blood Syndicate* #30. Rocket has been the moral compass of *Icon*, but the "Long, Hot Summer" presents an opportunity for a character from another title to espouse admirable values. Melodrama is an important strategy



A moment of crossover: in *Icon* #29, Rocket hears a character from another comic book speak. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.



A moment of crossover: in *Blood Syndicate* #30, the character Wise Son gives a speech heard throughout the shared universe of Milestone Media's comics. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

through which SF texts represent social themes, and in this story, it can be performed across the stage of several Milestone comics thanks to the tactics of crossover.

Icon #29 shipped on July 11, two weeks before *Blood Syndicate* #30. But the events portrayed in this issue of *Icon*, including the speech given by Wise Son, are represented as if they take place at the same time and location. The scene of Wise Son's speech also appears as the climax of *The Long Hot Summer* #3, the last issue of a limited series launched for the crossover, which shipped during the same week as *Blood Syndicate* #30. *Icon* was separated from *The Long Hot Summer* miniseries and *Blood Syndicate* by two weeks' time, but it was unified with each of them through the moment portrayed earlier. Imagery and verbal language overlap across these three comics, but each text invokes representational conventions of its own to participate in the shared strategy for representing a single event as the focal point of crossover.

In *Icon* #29, Wise Son's face looks very different from Raquel's—not just because they are different characters shown from different angles but because the weight of the lines and the kinds of angles that make up the pictures differ subtly, suggesting a difference of artistic technique. In fact, the image of Wise Son's face was produced for *Icon* #29 in the same way and by the same artist who drew it for *Blood Syndicate* #30. The same event, when portrayed in *Blood Syndicate* #30, depicts the ersatz superheroes storming Utopia Park to protect their neighborhood. They battle through superpowered security guards and team up with a cyborg named Bad Betty to take control of a jumbo screen large enough to be seen throughout the park. As events get out of hand, Wise Son gives a speech calling for calm and reflection over the video monitor, where everyone can see it. The imperiled attendees at the theme park pause to watch the message, and the readers of all the different Milestone comics involved are able to see it, as well.

The image cited in *Icon* #29 comes from *Blood Syndicate* #30, and Wise Son's face appears exactly as it was drawn, by the latter series's regular artist ChrisCross, in both texts. Rocket's face, like the rest of the images in *Icon* #29, was illustrated by that title's regular artist, M.D. Bright. In *Blood Syndicate*, the panel depicting Wise Son's face appears at an oblique angle corresponding to the vantage point of a viewer looking at the video screen in the park. Colorful pipes and cables appear around the image, as if the panel itself is a sophisticated electronic video screen. This gesture to the technological infrastructure represented in the image calls the reader's



A moment of crossover: in *The Long, Hot Summer* #3, the people of the fictitious city of Dakota, including superheroes, hear the speech given by Wise Son in *Blood Syndicate* #30 and *Icon* #29. Copyright Milestone Media, DC Comics.

attention to the infrastructure of the comics medium, as well. Wise Son's face is broadcast on a series of video screens throughout the space of the fictitious setting, and the image is remediated across the pages of several comics, published at different times. The portrayal of Wise Son's face in *The Long, Hot Summer* #3 is the work of Denys Cowan, the founding creative director of Milestone whose pencils are recognizable from his lifetime of work in the industry and from several issues of Milestone's *Hardware* and *Static*. Although Cowan depicts Wise Son's face differently from the way ChrisCross does, the text of the speech given in *The Long, Hot Summer* #3 reads the same as it does in *Blood Syndicate* #30, though it's divided into different word balloons. These three distinct texts are joined across time by imagery and across differing imagery by words. This set of images draws attention to the technologies that produce it—the comics panel and the serialized comic book—and the science fiction conceits depicted in it: the cyborg and the jumbo video screen. Together, they compose a vehicle for the telling of a story that defines what the comics are about and demonstrates how they function.

This moment of crossover, in content and in form, marks each installment in the “Long, Hot Summer” as a partial view of the whole, with different production and distribution maneuvers yielding different interpretations of the same fictitious event. The factors that influence Rocket's decision to intervene at Utopia, and the factors that send her home along with the other participants in the urban rebellion, can be illustrated in a variety of ways; Raquel is a superhero, and she is also a member of the Black community depicted in the text. The perspective that Rocket's decision about her pregnancy offers about being Black, sexually active, and a superhero, like the view that she provides regarding one urban community's relationship to humanity as a whole, is subjective and partial. This partiality makes the text amenable to crossover, resulting in a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. The encounter between Blackness and speculative fiction writ large may lend itself to this pattern of crossing over to produce a phenomenon that is not reducible to its points of departure.

Rocket bore little resemblance to familiar speculative fiction protagonists, but her actions reflected the medium in which her story was situated as well as its “message.” This unique synthesis was the felicitous outcome of the factors involved in the production of superhero comics, which include bringing together a range of reading practices with the hope that they will elicit desirable results, aesthetically and commercially. Although

there were more provocative tales told in the pages of other comics, the story of *Icon*, the most conventional Milestone text, illustrates how this unique intervention in speculative fiction and media rehearsed the controversies of race and genre.

Rather than defining what was possible in the pages of comic books in terms of the constraints imposed on young Black women's lives, the conjunction of race and genre with class, gender, and sexual politics in *Icon* reached beyond the limitations of conventional superhero narratives to tell a story worthy of Raquel's expansive Black imagination. Rocket was afforded the position to transform assumptions about what a young Black woman could do in the face of extraordinary possibilities and ordinary choices. At every decisive moment in the text, Rocket's decision engenders a variety of interpretations from readers, while drawing attention to the apparatus for storytelling that speculative fiction and comics built. With its critical position on the media landscape, enduring crossover would have been a dream come true for Milestone Media. Its unfortunately short-lived achievements toward that end demonstrate the capacity for innovations in popular media to be generic and novel at the same time.

5

THE GOLDEN GHETTO AND THE GLITTERING
PARENTHESES*The Once and Future Benjamin Sisko*

Looking back on the place, it may have been a ghetto, but it was a golden ghetto, a place of brotherhood and opportunity and wonder.

—**JAMES GUNN**, *ALTERNATE WORLDS: THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION*

Oppression—the social and political optimists to the contrary—does not imbue a people with wisdom or insight or sweet charity: it breeds in them instead a constant, blinding rage. . . . All over Harlem, Negro boys and girls are growing into stunted maturity, trying desperately to find a place to stand; and the wonder is not that so many are ruined but that so many survive. The Negro's outlets are desperately constricted. In his dilemma he turns first upon himself and then upon whatever most represents to him his own emasculation.

—**JAMES BALDWIN**, "THE HARLEM GHETTO: WINTER 1948"

IF THE LACK OF PRESTIGE accorded to SF texts and authors, compared to their more respected literary counterparts, is a significant factor in understanding the marginalizing function of genre distinctions, this subordination is even more salient when it comes to print adaptations of works intended for the screen: novelizations. Whereas literary and film critics have, in general, a mutual respect for the power and distinctiveness of both media, novelizations have never played a central role in major intellectual debates regarding either medium. Studies of adaptation tend to focus on print works that are translated into screenplays and subsequently produced as films. As I discuss in this chapter, however, novelization has a significant place in the history of speculative fiction, particularly as a

bridge between print speculative fiction and genre television. Perusing the genre fiction shelves of any library will demonstrate that novelizations composed a sizable portion of the market in SF texts in the last third of the twentieth century. When a Black SF author like Steven Barnes takes part in the paraliterary enterprise of novelization, particularly when he reflects on the meaning of authorship and racial identity, the work allows us to revisit the stories that the genre tells itself about its history with respect to the way race thinking informs the way texts are produced, interpreted, and adapted across media. By placing novelization at the center of an analysis of Black authorship in speculative fiction, I hope to encourage further considerations of what is at stake when Black readers, viewers, and authors participate in the genre.

Deep Space

The original *Star Trek* television series led to a still-thriving fandom, a succession of films, and a lifetime in the public eye for performers like Nichelle Nichols and George Takei. The continuing popularity of the franchise in the 1980s formed the basis for a subsequent television series that would broadcast new episodes well into the 1990s; the spinoff was aptly titled *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This chapter treats a moment of divergence within the sprawling canon that the Star Trek franchise composes. The opening credits of *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation* announce the starship *Enterprise*'s mission: "to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." At the end of the sixth *Star Trek* motion picture, *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, William Shatner as Captain Kirk famously revises the voice-over to summarize an enduring lesson from his recent adventure: "to boldly go where no man—no one—has gone before." That moment of interruption, reconsideration, and reaffirmation reflects the prevailing late-twentieth-century tendency to discard the use of "man" as a generic term. With the mid-1990s TV series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, that question is silently augmented by a story that posits the possibilities that ensue when the "man" who has not gone before is Black.

Deep Space Nine joins a celebrated tradition of Star Trek texts that foreground a utopian vision of interracial cooperation and scientific advancement. Making its debut after Gene Roddenberry's death, the series departed from the familiar format of the first two television productions in the franchise by eschewing the setting of the starship *Enterprise* for that of a

space station orbiting a far-off world. *Deep Space Nine* was broadcast contemporaneously with *The Next Generation* during the final seasons of the latter, positioning the new series to capitalize on the resurgence and expansion of Trek fandom generated by *The Next Generation*'s success. In addition to its stationary setting, *Deep Space Nine* departed from its predecessor by casting a Black actor as its leading man for the first time.

Benjamin Sisko, portrayed by Black American actor Avery Brooks, embarks on the series as a Starfleet commander—not yet promoted to the higher rank of captain—from Earth assigned to the far reaches of space to oversee the integration of a resource-rich planet into the Federation of Planets, following the planet's inhabitants' triumph over a brutal colonial occupation. A woman who once led the guerrilla movement to decolonize the planet serves as his reluctant second in command.¹ Unlike Shatner's Captain Kirk, the Casanova, and Patrick Stewart's Picard, the cosmopolitan, Brooks's character demonstrates devotion to his mission but ambivalence about his orders. More than any previous leading man in the saga, Ben Sisko is a soldier. His unflagging loyalty to the institution of Starfleet, despite his skepticism, reminds the viewer that the spacecraft portrayed in the Star Trek series are armed military vessels, even though the Federation champions diplomacy. The protagonist of *Deep Space Nine* struggles personally with questions that have emerged over the decades since *Star Trek* first began. By bringing these questions to the forefront of a genre

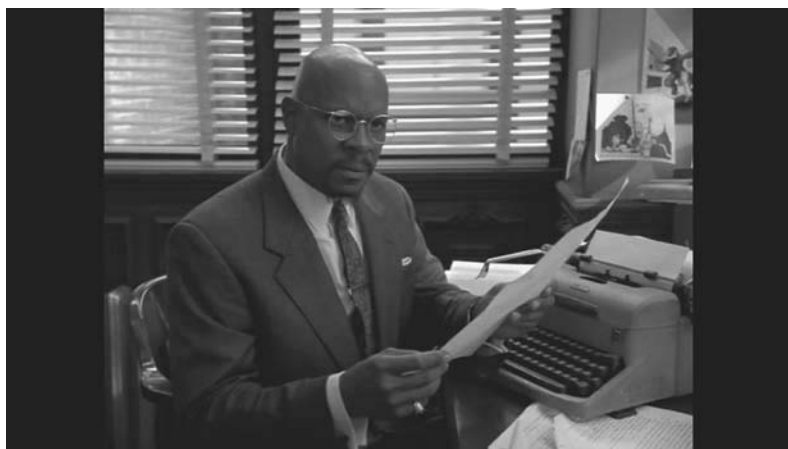


Avery Brooks as Captain Benjamin Sisko in the twenty-fourth century in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, season 6, episode 13, "Far beyond the Stars." Copyright Paramount Pictures.

text known for its harmonious vision, *Deep Space Nine* reiterates *Star Trek's* twentieth-century utopian narrative through the lens of speculative Blackness.

In 1998, Marc Scott Zicree wrote a teleplay for *Deep Space Nine* that would remove its cast and crew even further into the expansive frontiers portrayed throughout the *Star Trek* franchise. His story, titled “The Cold and Distant Stars,” would send Avery Brooks’s character far back in time to the twentieth-century United States, where he would live the life of a Black American writer named Benny Russell. As Russell worked on the staff of the science fiction magazine *Incredible Tales*, he would experience discrimination and ostracism among his peers and intimidation and violence from authority figures. Russell was a man ahead of his time. He would write a story called “Deep Space Nine,” in which a Black commander led the crew of a space station in a far corner of the galaxy: the story of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. The episode recontextualizes the television series, which was enjoying its sixth season at that point, by presenting a story within a story. Casting Avery Brooks’s Blackness in stark relief against the trenchant White supremacy of the mid-twentieth-century United States, the episode would raise troubling questions about the inspirational rhetoric of science fiction—and *Star Trek* in particular—by situating the dynamics of racial conflict squarely within the history of the genre.

“The Cold and Distant Stars” would give *Star Trek's* audience a chance to reflect on the historical perspectives that informed their desired vision



A glimpse into the past: Avery Brooks as twentieth-century science fiction writer Benny Russell in “Far beyond the Stars.” Copyright Paramount Pictures.

of the future. *Star Trek* grew out of histories of racial, sexual, and national politics as well as the histories of writing and publication, and of broadcast and cinematic performance, that inform twentieth-century science fiction. Its various incarnations—*Star Trek*, 1966–69; *The Animated Series*, 1973–74; *The Next Generation*, 1987–94; and *Deep Space Nine*, 1993–99; more than a dozen films based on the first two series; and later, two more television series (*Voyager* and *Enterprise*) and a new series of films—compose a single visual “mega-text,” a term Daniel Bernardi coins in his *Star Trek and History: Race-ing toward a White Future* to describe the inter-related *Star Trek* productions as “a relatively coherent and seemingly unending enterprise of televisual, filmic, auditory, and written texts” that sprawls across media and time.² Bernardi’s work ably explains how the original *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation* envision a future beyond racism while still falling prey to the shortcomings of the liberal discourse that produced them. Though it was on the air at the time of the work’s publication, the study omits any substantive discussion of the significance of *Deep Space Nine*.

Bernardi’s exclusion of *Deep Space Nine* from his book on *Star Trek* and race is a symptom of a larger problem inherent in the notion that the mega-text across *Star Trek* series is “relatively coherent.” As I explore in this chapter, reflections on the history of the franchise and the popular imagination of which it is a part yield strikingly dissonant examples of race thinking. One of the characteristic contributions *Star Trek* made to television in the United States, as I argued in chapter 2, was its favorable portrayal of interracial and international cooperation, along with some degree of gender equality, as aspects of a utopian future. Whatever constraints it may have placed on their roles, the series valorized the service of men and women of color and White women, under the benevolent command of an affable and heroic White male captain, even while desegregation, decolonization, feminist movements, and Cold War rivalries made for tumultuous relations among those groups in reality. Allegorical treatments of race and racism became a trademark in the franchise as it extended into films and the subsequent *Next Generation* series. *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), for instance, portrays a despicable proponent of eugenics as a villain from the twenty-first century, staging a fictitious confrontation between the better and worse sides of scientific progress. *The Next Generation* frequently invoked the “Prime Directive,” a rule that bars the interplanetary collective in which the crew of the starship *Enterprise* participate from interfering in the affairs of “less advanced”

civilizations. Star Trek is a discovery narrative, imagining a new age of exploration modeled on European colonial expeditions. These themes were present from the beginning, as were reflections of race in American history. Mr. Spock's commitment to logic courted White suspicion of "Oriental" self-discipline, while his struggle to inhabit a hybrid identity (a mother from Earth, a father from the planet Vulcan) echoes historical narratives about people of mixed racial heritage, including the "tragic mulatto" archetype.³ As it sprawled into a mega-text, however, the prevalence of allegorical racial themes across episodes and films in the franchise sedimented into a generic structure: in the twenty-first century, Star Trek is not only an SF narrative but a racial narrative, embedded in American cultural traditions alongside the Black-White buddy film and the captivity narrative.⁴ The weight of generations of utopianism accumulated into a distinct cultural politics for Star Trek, posing the question of how actors and authors witnessing ongoing discrimination in the present comprehended their experiences in relation to a narrative that treated racism as an issue of the past. Sisko's character presents an unusually straightforward rendition of Blackness rooted in an African American frame of reference.⁵ Though it would be superficial to take a few explicit markers of racial identity as the entirety of the evidence for *Deep Space Nine's* treatment of the issue, Brooks's performance, along with the episode and the novelization I discuss in this chapter, deviate from Star Trek's typical racial politics in one crucial way: they replace allegory with history.

Houston Baker summarizes the stakes of turning toward the historical in cultural politics by noting that nostalgic treatments of the racial past foreclose the continual revaluation of the lessons to learn from history. By referring to "a past filled with golden virtues, golden men and sterling events," nostalgia writes off the disruptive moments through which social change takes place as aberrations. Inspired turns away from nostalgia, conversely, demonstrate "critical memory"—the will to draw decisive moments from the past into conversation with the present to sustain a vision of social change.⁶ This chapter argues that a critical memory of the racial past of science fiction, and of Star Trek in particular, was *Deep Space Nine's* signature contribution to television. The episode in question and its adaptation into the form of a novel by Steven Barnes represent the fullest expression of the series's potential to signify the meaning of Blackness for an era shaped by generations of print speculative fiction and genre television.

The aforementioned episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* changed its title to "Far beyond the Stars" once it was brought to the screen. *Far beyond*

the Stars is also the title of the print adaptation of this episode, a novelization by Black American science fiction writer Steven Barnes. In my view, bringing Zicree's teleplay to the screen occasioned an examination of the Star Trek saga's racial past from a perspective shaped by that past in unique ways. To construct a moment in the series into a lens able to refract Star Trek through the racial history of speculative fiction in which it played a part, the episode mobilized the racialized bodies of actors, historically specific signs of the racial and popular cultural past, and the centralized perspective of a Black performer and auteur (Avery Brooks, the series's star, directed the episode). "Far beyond the Stars" thereby enacted a "rereading" of Star Trek and earlier SF texts to contextualize the racial questions playing out on the set of *Deep Space Nine*.

In his adaptation *Far beyond the Stars*, Steven Barnes wrote a simultaneous version of the story in a form that emblemizes the entwined histories of print science fiction and genre television—the novelization. The personal significance of Barnes's participation in *Deep Space Nine* emerges prominently in his comments on the series's discourse of gender. Barnes explains his particular grievance with the unfulfilled promise of science fiction by noting how a genre that he and other observers of popular culture have viewed as instrumental to widely shared notions of masculinity excludes Black male characters as inspirational figures, thereby marginalizing Black masculinity. In his youth, the pages and screens on which he longed to see a future for himself remained elusive as sites of identification because of racial marginalization and emasculating stereotypes. While the teleplay and the performance of the series's ensemble enumerate the protagonist's struggle against racism among the past wrongs for which the bright future envisioned in the Star Trek saga promises redress, Barnes's novelization dwells in the past to cultivate a unique perspective on Black Americans' relationship to science fiction and the historical milieu in which it took shape. In *Far beyond the Stars*, he extends the historicizing gesture made by the television episode to reach further backward and inward, not only imagining the possibility of finding a writer with Avery Brooks's face in science fiction's past but looking within that writer, at the historical context of his youth, to examine how that young man would have first experienced early-twentieth-century science fiction as a member of its audience. To complement Barnes's account of what he missed out on as a young reader excluded from science fiction, *Far beyond the Stars* stages a critical intervention into the genre by exploring what

science fiction missed out on by denying the value of Black creativity. In so doing, Barnes's novelization performs the work of reparation toward the Whiteness of science fiction, installing a rationale in the genre's past for gestures of inclusion it had only begun in the present.

In the teleplay that forms the basis for the episode in question, the fictitious writer Benny Russell confronts the Whiteness of science fiction as an outgrowth of the racist social structure that I have argued sets the terms for participation in the field of cultural production. In Steven Barnes's hands, the novelization becomes a mode of communicating an alternative understanding of the history of cultural production, a critical perspective on the present, and a liberatory vision of the future. These knowledge formations are all grounded in a conscientious approach to understanding racial identity and oppression as well as in a unique perspective on the relationship between Black masculinity and popular culture that I highlight as a shared concern among an emergent cohort of Black SF writers, including Barnes. The interconnected works I examine in this chapter offer resources toward a theory of the speculative fiction of Blackness: a vantage point within Black culture that generates artifacts evocative of the fantastic genres.

The Golden Age

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, points out the benefits of analyzing adaptations emphatically “as adaptations.”⁷⁷ Hutcheon and Marjorie Garber disclaim that sequels and fan fiction are not adaptations, however, because sequels and fan fiction attest to the desire of “never wanting a story to end” rather than “wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways.”⁷⁸ To understand how *Deep Space Nine* addresses prior Star Trek and science fiction texts, however, we have to view its efforts to address both of the aforementioned aims. The series as a whole attempts to defer the ending of the Star Trek story, making it a sequel. “Far beyond the Stars,” however, tells the story of Star Trek in a radically new way, making it an adaptation. To situate the adaptive work that “Far beyond the Stars” achieves squarely within the bounds of *Deep Space Nine*'s function as an extension of the larger Star Trek saga, I discuss the particular kind of sequel that *Deep Space Nine* constitutes—a spinoff—as a form of adaptation. Hutcheon identifies the processes that characterize an adaptation as follows:

An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
An extended intertextual engagement with an adapted work⁹

In light of these criteria, we might examine how, after an initial version of a narrative emerges in any medium, subsequent installments of its story told in the same or another medium can elaborate on, respond to, and revise their textual antecedent as both adaptations and sequels. Understanding the relationship of a spinoff like *Deep Space Nine* to its textual precedents requires a concept of adaptation that acknowledges how the processes of telling a story over and over in different ways, allowing the story to continue indefinitely, can be coterminous. The premises are not mutually exclusive.

Viewed as a “creative and an interpretive act of appropriation,” in light of Hutcheon’s second criterion, “Far beyond the Stars” benefits from further theories of adaptation that account for the place of such interventions within the wider array of adaptive practices. Julie Sanders fleshes out a theory of “appropriation,” in relation to other forms of adaptation, as a “more decisive journey away from the informing sourcetext into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another.”¹⁰ Sanders’s delineation between the particular strategies of appropriation under the larger umbrella of adaptation provides a useful framework in which to situate “Far beyond the Stars,” an appropriation, within the larger project of adaptation that *Deep Space Nine* constitutes. *Deep Space Nine* extends the story of *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, whereas “Far beyond the Stars” appropriates liberally from other sources. The twentieth-century sequences in the episode make themselves legible as part of *Deep Space Nine* by retaining the usual cast, notably Avery Brooks, and also occasionally interrupting the past with visions of the future. “Far beyond the Stars” also appropriates the textual and visual signs of golden age science fiction writing to represent the problem at the heart of the episode as one that belongs to the past as well as the future.

In “Far beyond the Stars,” the principal actors in *Deep Space Nine* portray characters whose names and personalities appropriate those of science fiction writers who rose to fame in the 1950s. Actors whose exoticized makeup and wardrobe typically cast them as extraterrestrial Bajorans, Ferengis, and Klingons in *Deep Space Nine* appear without these

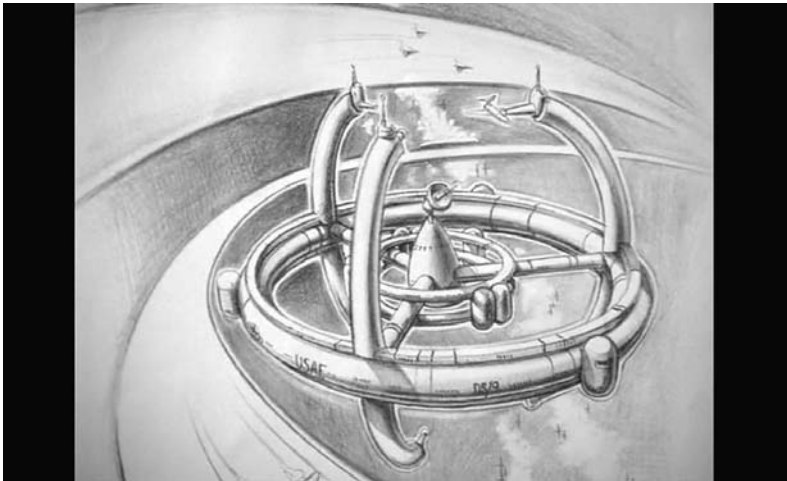
accoutrements in the episode, adapting their bodies to a new setting while eliciting uncanny reminders of the genre context familiar to viewers. Nana Visitor plays the captain's right hand, the proud Bajoran Major Kira Nerys throughout the series, but in "Far beyond the Stars," she approximates the characteristics of C. L. Moore as the witty female author K. C. Hunter. Hunter is married to one Julius Eaton, portrayed by the actor usually in the role of the space station's doctor, Alexander Siddig. The duo is modeled on C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, who did virtually all their writing together.¹¹ In his only performance in a *Star Trek* episode without makeup, Armin Shimerman portrays Herbert Rossoff, a passionate and politically enlightened writer of reputable talent, instead of the space station's affable but self-centered bartender from the planet Ferenginar, Quark. Rossoff's persona evokes the celebrated Harlan Ellison, who wrote, memorably, for the original *Star Trek* series and who advanced the careers of amateurs, women, and Black writers in the genre. A mock cover for the issue of the fictitious *Incredible Tales* magazine in which Russell's story is slated to appear identifies Rossoff as the author of "Hazardous Images," titled after Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthologies.¹² The most direct and affectionate appropriation in "Far beyond the Stars" is the characterization, by Colm Meaney,



A glimpse into the past: Armin Shimerman, Nana Visitor, Alexander Siddig, Rene Auberjonois, Terry Farrell, and Colm Meaney as the staff of the twentieth-century science fiction magazine *Incredible Tales* in "Far beyond the Stars." Copyright Paramount Pictures.

of an absent-minded but innovative writer named Albert Macklin, who announces the publication of his novel *Me, Android* by Gnome Press in the episode. The Macklin character favors Isaac Asimov, who published the collection *I, Robot* with Gnome in 1950.¹³

These acts of appropriation enable “Far beyond the Stars” to pay homage to the golden age science fiction writers in whose footsteps the creators of *Star Trek* follow. The conceit of Benny Russell as a character, furthermore, grows logically out of the historical setting of “Far beyond the Stars.” Russell, we learn, started writing science fiction as an amateur while he served in the navy. He conceives his story for *Incredible Tales*, appropriately titled “Deep Space Nine,” in the same manner as the other writers present: by taking inspiration from an eye-catching illustration circulated by the magazine’s in-house artist. The sight of the drawing strikes Russell deeply. The USAF insignia on the artist’s image of a space station evokes his military service, and the sweeping lines signifying movement ignite his sense of wonder around aeronautics. Like his contemporaries Gene Roddenberry (creator of *Star Trek*), L. Ron Hubbard (father of Scientology), and Alice Sheldon (otherwise known as James Tiptree Jr.), a background in military service informs the aesthetics and politics that Benny Russell would bring into his career as an SF writer.



An illustration of the space station that inspires twentieth-century author Benny Russell to write a science fiction story with a Black protagonist in “Far beyond the Stars.” This image would provide the cover of the novelization *Far beyond the Stars*. Copyright Paramount Pictures.

Russell settles for stale donuts in the office and less than four cents a word in compensation. Russell's participation in these practices throughout the episode situates him firmly within the conventions of the genre and its material constraints. He and the story he writes seem plausible because they function recognizably within the creative economy established in the episode. With his *Star Trek* cohorts dressed in the details about writers and writing appropriated from the history of print SF publications, Avery Brooks can transform from Ben Sisko, space station captain, into Benny Russell, author.

Appropriated images like these form a composite portrait of *Star Trek* and golden age science fiction writing on which "Far beyond the Stars" offers a unique perspective. Brooks becomes the Benny Russell character for the duration of the episode after he looks up from a portable digital display device, in his uniform as Captain Ben Sisko, to find himself surrounded by the bustle and noise of New York City's streets, wearing a suit, tie, and fedora. His point of view suddenly shifts to the new object in his hands: an issue of *Galaxy Science Fiction* dated September 1953. This publication is an evocative touchstone from the period the episode portrays. As a visual artifact, however, Russell's *Galaxy* is a telling departure from the historical record. The volume in Russell's hands displays a night scene with a rocket blasting off beside a glass skyscraper. The image on the magazine cover is a rendition of the studio-commissioned background, by painter Albert Whitlock, used as a setting by the 1960s *Trek* franchise on television, a setting called "Starbase Eleven."¹⁴ The title that appears on the magazine Russell is holding is "Court Martial," which was the name of the original *Star Trek* episode featuring this "Starbase Eleven" background. In reality, the September 1953 issue of *Galaxy Science Fiction* featured an illustration by Ed Emshwiller for its cover story titled "The Touch of Your Hand" by Theodore Sturgeon.¹⁵

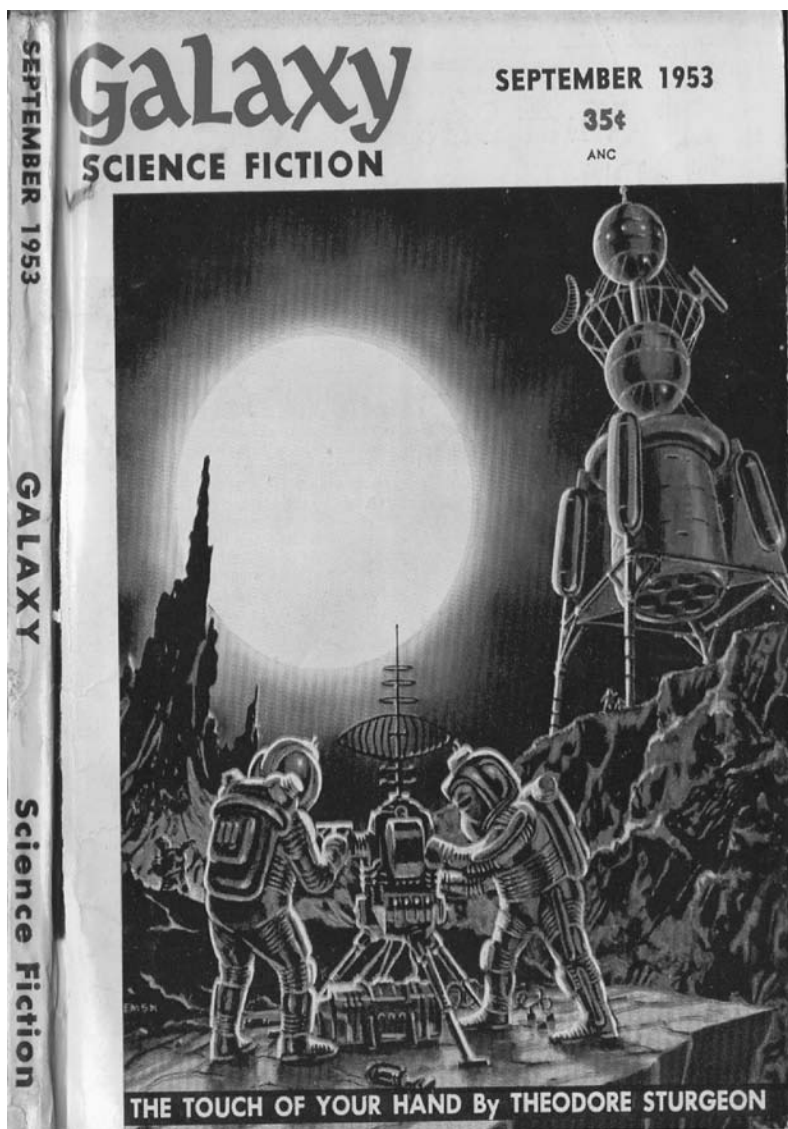
The composition of the mock cover used by *Deep Space Nine* as a television prop echoes that of the original. From left to right on each cover, solar and sunlike light sources illuminate dark, rocky landscapes on which human-built structures, called a "Solar Weather Station" and a "Starbase," respectively, evidence human modification of the landscape. The positioning of Brooks's hands in the two shots wherein he first looks up from the display device and then looks back down at the magazine cover evocatively illustrate the title of Sturgeon's cover story, as if the touch of Avery Brooks's hand was the object of golden age science fiction authors' desire. The background artwork from the original *Star Trek* series unmistakably

bears the touch of Ed Emshwiller's hand, showing the family resemblance between the graphic sensibilities of golden age and television-era science fiction, but the fictitious Benny Russell bridges this gap. Positioning a Black body into this historical lineage, having him take hold of images from one era of science fiction and carry them into another is *Deep Space Nine's* signature adaptive and historical gesture.

The adapted *Galaxy* magazine thrust into Avery Brooks's hands presents his character with two challenges: to fit in and to stand out. As a Black science fiction writer, he portrays Russell to show how his visible racial difference is pertinent to the history of science fiction, in the print media past and in the age of television. Brooks's performance as Russell situates the episode in a variety of media and racial contexts—each of which becomes the center of the viewer's attention. An uncharacteristic number of scenes set in the future and the past showcase interactions among people of color, decentering the White actors who make up the plurality of the principal cast members in a rare turn for *Star Trek* or any dramatic series on television. When Captain Sisko awakens from his first vision of the past in the space station's infirmary, the group of actors around him includes Penny Johnson as his love interest; Captain Kasidy Yates; Cirroc



Touching the past: the cover of a fictionalized version of *Galaxy* magazine for September 1953, with a cover story titled “Court Martial,” depicted in author Benny Russell’s hands in “Far beyond the Stars.” The magazine cover features a reproduction of a matte painting by Albert Whitlock originally utilized in *Star Trek* (the original series), season 1, episode 14, “Court Martial.” Copyright Paramount Pictures.



The cover of the historical *Galaxy* magazine for September 1953, featuring an image by Ed Emshwiller. The cover story in this actually existing issue of the magazine was "The Touch of Your Hand," by Theodore Sturgeon.

Lofton as his son Jake; Brock Peters as his father, Joseph; and Alexander Siddig as the space station's doctor, Julian Bashir. This interaction, in a series that has historically diverted its viewers' attention from familiar racial distinctions to perform a color-blind future, foreshadows the segregated spaces of the twentieth century portrayed later in the episode.

The urban United States in 1953 was not a homogeneous space, but "Far beyond the Stars" aims to display a prevailing tendency, segregation, that distinguishes this setting from its twenty-fourth-century counterpart. The absence of racialized barriers to access in public spaces, institutions, and careers as a distinguishing characteristic of Star Trek's future comes to the fore through the presentation of contrasting examples from Russell's era. Crucial scenes in the episode take place in a diner whose employees and patrons are all Black and, later, on a Harlem street. While the makeup of the ensemble in the space station infirmary scene presents racial distinctiveness as a coincidence, Russell's setting in 1953 makes the all-Black spaces in which Russell takes part legible as part of a broader regime of visible racial boundaries.

The performance of *Deep Space Nine's* racially diverse and gender-inclusive cast as the staff of *Incredible Tales* lays the groundwork for a



Black space: Penny Johnson, Brock Peters, and Cirroc Lofton as Captain Sisko's family in the twenty-fourth century in "Far beyond the Stars." Copyright Paramount Pictures.

critique of twentieth-century segregation consistent with the series's contribution to Star Trek's pluralism. The portrait of science fiction writers that "Far beyond the Stars" offers contends that women and people of color have been present as a creative force throughout the history of science fiction, but their contributions have disappeared. Though his peers are not quite exclusively White—Eaton is an ethnically ambiguous Briton—the first explicit indication that Russell doesn't belong comes when the editor informs the writers that they will be photographed for their readers the next day. He tells Russell and Nana Visitor's character, Kay, that they "can sleep late." Betraying the appearance of an integrated institution would be transgressive in this time period, so the magazine prefers to portray itself as all White and all male. Institutions like *Incredible Tales*, the episode suggests, rely on and perpetuate the invisible labor of women and people of color. In so doing, they perpetuate a discourse of participatory culture in which only White male audience members can enjoy the pleasure of identification. Despite Russell's writing, which will make him the focus of the episode, and despite K. C. Hunter's personal and professional inextricability from the work that forms the magazine's identity, they are asked to disappear.



Black space: Avery Brooks, as twentieth-century science fiction writer Benny Russell, joyfully accompanies Black children down the street in "Far beyond the Stars." Copyright Paramount Pictures.

The process of sexist and racist exclusion invoked in the setup for the group photo relies on the interaction of the visual, performance, and printed texts that inform the episode. The group photo is a document of the work done at the magazine for its readers; portraits in the magazine can either secure readers' presumptive belief that all their favorite science fiction writers are White men, or they can dispel that vision. "Far beyond the Stars" casts doubt on assumptions about the history of print science fiction by enabling contemporary viewers to imagine non-White, non-male writers at work on a magazine in the 1950s. At the same time, the episode also stages the act that removes women and people of color from the visual record of the genre. "Far beyond the Stars" configures the act of exclusion as a play-within-a-play, a moment from behind the scenes in the production of print science fiction. It recasts the relationship between print texts from the era and the visual frames of reference that shape the way we read them, including pictures of their authors, as mediated performances rather than transparent documents. By appropriating, juxtaposing, and synthesizing elements of different forms and settings, "Far beyond the Stars" makes visible the irrational conundrum that the dehumanizing racism of the past represents to a Black subject convinced, by his own experience, of his humanity.

Viewing "Far beyond the Stars" as an adaptation requires that we situate it not only as a reinterpretation of previous *Star Trek* narratives and an homage to golden age science fiction writing but as a self-conscious engagement with accounts of mid-twentieth-century racial discrimination outside the SF genre. Benny Russell's predicament synthesizes an original but plausible encounter between these frames of reference using authenticating details—names, places, texts—and assumes the posture of a faithful reproduction of the bygone era rather than an allegorical representation of it. The rest of *Star Trek* places its cast in alien circumstances to distance itself from the familiar challenges of race relations. "Far beyond the Stars" enacts a return to, instead of a break from, a troubled chapter in that history.

Performing Adaptation

Bringing Zicree's teleplay to the screen was a predictable enough process for a director and crew familiar with the television business. Turning that story into a memorable work of print fiction, however, demanded talent in a different register. The rationale for tapping Brooks to direct the episode

yields some insights into the role of Stephen Barnes as the author of the adaptation I discuss subsequently. Of the screen version, Steve Oster, a producer for *Deep Space Nine*, explains why Avery Brooks was an appropriate director: "This was a story about racism and prejudice and we felt very strongly that it would be wrong if it came from a bunch of people who didn't necessarily know about that experience."¹⁶ Oster's comment falls prey to the fallacy that only the victims and not the beneficiaries of discriminatory acts understand their logic. Oster also notes that Brooks's task, as a director, would be particularly challenging because "he was going to be in every frame of film."¹⁷ Reading the story told in the teleplay enables one to ask, by examining the verbal signs deployed in the text, what it means to recast *Star Trek* as a narrative about racism and prejudice. Viewing the episode as it aired through the lens of adaptation, however, enables us to ask a different question: how does Brooks's direction of the television episode affect the text's treatment of racism?

The demands of bringing "Far beyond the Stars" to the screen bring to mind the stakes of interpreting representation, on one hand, and engaging in self-representation, on the other. Scholars like Mia Bay, in *White Image in the Black Mind*, have detailed how Black perceptions of White people and Black perspectives on racial ideology are marginalized within intellectual and cultural institutions built on White supremacy. These systems of meaning making tend to afford White people the privileges of diagnosing racism on their own terms and prescribing the remedies for it that they prefer.¹⁸ For Brooks to convey the writers' and producers' notions of what prejudice and discrimination mean, as an actor, he must tacitly accept the terms in which they frame these issues with limited room for innovation, like Nichelle Nichols in the original *Star Trek*. As a director, however, Brooks's expanded role in adapting the treatment of race relations in the teleplay for television presents an opportunity to shift those terms. Fashioning the space in which performance for the screen takes place, as a director, involves work beyond that of writing and reading a print text, and agency is a dimension of that work.

To think about cultural production, including adaptation, as a process in which authors (or directors, or audiences) enact particular forms of agency, we might conceptualize different media as different spaces of representation. Robert Stam refers to the process of differentiating these discursive spaces in literature-to-film adaptation as "the multiplication of registers."¹⁹ Rather than focusing on what is "lost" in an adaptation's attempt to perform fidelity to its source text, Stam highlights how film

takes advantage of “its multitrack and multiformat nature” to juxtapose and transition between the times and spaces of its narrative, utilizing medium-specific tools that complement those of writing. Though cinema and television, according to some adaptation studies, lack the versatility of print text, a panoply of techniques indicates the temporal and spatial distance between settings in “Far beyond the Stars.” The antiquated sound of car horns, for instance, situates Brooks’s character in New York City when he first finds himself reading *Galaxy* in the twentieth century. Later in the episode, maintaining some aural and visual cues while changing others allows Penny Johnson and Avery Brooks to appear as if they are two different pairs of characters in two different settings within the same scene.

The scene intercuts shots set in two different time frames as each pair of characters portrayed by Johnson and Brooks is dancing to the same soft jazz music in both a Harlem apartment and the captain’s quarters in the twenty-fourth century. Johnson’s twenty-fourth-century character murmurs wistfully, “It’s times like these I wish we had never heard of the Dominion,” referring to the villains that menace the galaxy in *Deep Space*



Penny Johnson as Captain Kasidy Yates and Avery Brooks as Captain Sisko dance together, on a set made to evoke the twenty-fourth-century Cardassian architecture of the space station they call home, the eponymous Deep Space Nine, in “Far beyond the Stars.” Brooks is wearing the same apparel as his twentieth-century alter ego. Copyright Paramount Pictures.

Nine. The twentieth-century version of Brooks's character queries Johnson about the line, but twentieth-century Cassie has no idea what he's talking about. Only Brooks maintains a point of view that transcends both the scenes, signaled by his appearance in the same costume. His perception turns Johnson's line, "times like these," into an uncanny echo, because in the twentieth century, neither one of them has ever heard of the Dominion. The pitch of the episode's score in the background rises to cleave the scene with the heightened tension between its doubled settings. These multiple sonic and visual registers provide space for the differentiation of perspectives: a spacefarer struggles to "remember" a past he has never experienced, while his dancing partner speaks to a future she can't possibly imagine.

Considered as an adaptation, the prolific detail in the visual realization of the teleplay belies the notion that adaptations suffer from lack. In fact, the interaction between visual and aural media synthesizes the resources of both to invoke new possibilities. In view of this approach to adaptation, Barnes's rendition of the teleplay as a novel raises the question of whether turning a work intended for the screen into one intended for the page constitutes a generative process, as well.

Framing Authorship

Just as Stam points to adaptation as a discourse of the enrichment rather than poverty of meaning, Imelda Wheelan argues, "Rather than a tendency to see the film/TV adaptation of a literary text as necessarily lacking some of the force and substance of its original, it might be more fruitful to regard . . . adaptations of a novel in terms of *excess* rather than lack."²⁰ *Screen to Text*, the subtitle of Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Wheelan's work on adaptation, and *Films into Books*, the title of Randall Larson's analysis of novelizations, are close to the mark as descriptions of the process of adaptation that produces works like *Far beyond the Stars*. These studies suggest that adaptations ought not be regarded as subordinate to their antecedents; in fact, the relationship between adaptations and the works they adapt may not be hierarchical at all. Like many novelizations, *Far beyond the Stars* emerged from the author's interpretation of the screenplay rather than (and prior to) the episode in its visual form.²¹ The relation between screen and print texts that situates *Far beyond the Stars* with respect to its television counterpart is a matter of juxtaposition rather than logical sequence. Therefore I read Barnes's novelization as part of a

reflexive process in which screen and print interpretations of the same teleplay must be understood alongside one another. Larson's text establishes a basis for understanding novelizations as a form in their own right, which allows us to examine them on an equal plane with print-to-screen adaptations.

Larson's *Films into Books* draws on letters, interviews, and bibliographies from a number of authors of novelizations, the preponderance of whom are science fiction and fantasy writers. He acknowledges his initial presupposition that novelizations are merely "another commercial tool of the film studio—like toys, coloring books, and Star Wars bed sheets."²² This supposition has a basis in literary history. After Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone* novelizations sold more than half a million copies, Ace Books commissioned author Michael Avallone to write a novel based on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* with the permission of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. The runaway success of the latter, selling more than a million copies, set in place the commercial precedent for marketing print versions of television series, but it also laid the groundwork for creative departures from that model.²³ Larson points out a key distinction between the prototypical novelizations of film and television, respectively: whereas the former usually consists of rehashing a screenplay in the form of a novel, the latter typically presents an original plot mobilizing the broader story elements, characters, and setting of a series rather than a retelling of an existing TV episode in print form. In this way, many novelizations function as spinoffs and sequels related to a text in the same medium as well as adaptations.

Star Trek has a special place in the history of adaptations, which is one reason I have discussed it in more than one chapter of this book. Whereas Avallone and other writers produced numerous *U.N.C.L.E.* novels telling original stories, Bantam Books commissioned science fiction writer and genre critic James Blish to novelize every episode of *Star Trek* beginning in 1967.²⁴ Ballantine Books published novelizations of every episode of the animated series, and Pocket Books commissioned novelizations for all the *Star Trek* films by prominent SF writers, including feminist science fiction author Vonda McIntyre.²⁵ Barnes joined a tradition inaugurated by Avallone, Blish, McIntyre, and other well-known authors with *Far beyond the Stars*. Like his collaborations with Larry Niven, writing a novelization situated Barnes firmly within the mainstream of SF writers; I emphasize this to suspend, for the time being, questions regarding what is particularly "Black" about Barnes's writerly practices. His career is as representative of successful SF writers in general as it is for Black authors in particular.

Examining how the novelization *Far beyond the Stars* relates to “Far beyond the Stars” on the screen and to the common print precursor of both productions—the teleplay originally titled “The Cold and Distant Stars”—demands a reading that will undo the boundaries constructed by a unidirectional analysis of the relationship between film and print. Undoing adaptation, by conceptualizing Barnes’s print work *Far beyond the Stars* as an extension of his authorship rather than solely an act of fidelity to the mythology of Star Trek, enables the reader to examine how Barnes intervenes in the history of print speculative fiction from a position that is simultaneously situated within its boundaries and also responsive to a history of alienation from the genre.

Undoing Adaptation

Though Linda Hutcheon’s, Marjorie Garber’s, and Robert Stam’s theories of adaptation hinge on the formal qualities of and dialogue between texts that enable practices of “reading adaptations as adaptations,” critic Sandra Grayson treats Barnes’s *Far beyond the Stars* as a text with “a life of its own.”²⁶ Instead of comparing the novelization to its television counterpart, Grayson makes use of a speculative fiction analytic called “paraspace,” borrowing from Samuel Delany the description of a “space of narration, of nostalgia, of ideological intricacies (i.e., a space of blame and resignation), and of lyricism,” in which the impossible becomes possible.²⁷ In Grayson’s estimation, *Far beyond the Stars* consists of a series of interdependent paraspaces separated by time (1940, 1953, and the twenty-fourth century). Although each setting is characterized by properties that are excluded from the others, such as racial segregation in the twentieth century and space exploration in the future, they function alongside one another to make the novelization whole. Historically specific textual markers of setting inform Grayson’s reading of *Far beyond the Stars* as a work steeped in the SF tradition first, and as an adaptation second. Grayson’s reading of the novel complicates the notion that we ought to read it primarily as an adaptation rather than considering it primarily as an example of Steven Barnes’s writing. Accordingly, I present additional textual touchstones that demonstrate how *Far beyond the Stars* exemplifies Barnes’s engagement with paraliterary practices besides adaptation.

The noncomparative analysis Grayson pursues in *Visions of the Third Millennium* lends credence to Sarah Cardwell’s approach to adaptations. Cardwell advises that the tendency to compare film and television versions

of literary works to their print antecedents “admits a fundamental and determining relationship between ‘this film’ and ‘this book’ and leads frequently to ‘fidelity criticism’”—an unnecessarily deferential assumption that the purpose of an adaptation is to reproduce faithfully its predecessor text.²⁸ Abandoning this assumption benefits the study of novelizations, in particular; if literary works demand that their film adaptations perform “fidelity” by virtue of being written first, then novelizations provide no structural cues about the value of their similarity to and difference from their visual counterparts, because teleplays are not necessarily adapted into novel form before they are filmed. Instead, a noncomparative approach to novelizations calls for a mode of reading that treats multiple renditions of a text as incommensurable with one another, in some ways. Grayson’s reading of *Far beyond the Stars* suggests that paraspace might serve as a model for the nonhierarchical way in which adaptations relate to the texts they adapt. She argues, “Paraspaces are not in a hierarchical relation—at least not in a simple and easy hierarchical relation—to the narrative’s ‘real,’ or ordinary, space.”²⁹ In *Far beyond the Stars*, the settings in which young Benny Russell’s, adult Benny Russell’s, and Captain Sisko’s respective experiences take place are not hierarchically stacked but parenthetically “nested” within one another, with each setting situated in a mutually informative relationship to the others that Russell/Sisko struggles to understand. Barnes mobilizes a number of textual tactics to guide the reader toward a noncomparative reading of the relationship between the new settings he employs and the usual setting of *Deep Space Nine*.

In its opening pages, *Far beyond the Stars* gestures toward the capacity of adaptation to shift the reader’s perception in fundamental ways. Whereas the television episode, like most in the series, begins and ends focused on the experience of Avery Brooks as the protagonist, the novelization opens from the point of view of the second principal character in *Deep Space Nine*, Major Kira. Kira flies in a shuttlecraft from her home planet to the space station. As her shuttle approaches the station, she observes, “When approached from the side its docking pylons resembled nothing so much as a glittering pair of parentheses linked by a central docking ring.”³⁰ This grammatical simile calls attention to the textual form of Barnes’s adaptation. Constructing the eponymous setting of *Deep Space Nine*’s action within parentheses suggests that the television series unfolds within the ongoing saga of Star Trek and the broader history of speculative fiction. Similarly, the novelization takes up a parenthetical position

in relation to the televised episode. *Far beyond the Stars* is a comment on “Far beyond the Stars,” informed by both the specificity of the novelization’s medium and its ineluctable relationship to television as a specific form of adaptation created to supplement a TV series. Through the tools of writing, Barnes offers an interpretative supplement to the story that his readers have presumably already encountered in visual form. Barnes exploits the adaptive process to comment on the conceit of both the television episode and the novelization: revisiting a history that accounts for the absence of people of color, and Black men in particular, from the legacy of golden age science fiction. In Barnes’s hands, adaptation provides a pair of glittering parentheses in which to parlay the ersatz subordination of his authorship, given the ancillary status outlined for the novelization as a form, into the basis for a meaningful critical engagement with the historical and political contexts of speculative fiction. His novelization recognizes the latent critique of *Deep Space Nine*: the failure of speculative fiction to display an investment in the value of Black creativity at an early stage in the formation of its traditions has had lingering effects throughout the history of the genre.

As I contend is the case for many Black interventions in speculative fiction, the synthesis of genre conventions through which *Far beyond the Stars* constructs a unique mode of storytelling draws on disparate areas of knowledge, including some that are signified through scientific verisimilitude and others that are more closely identified with antirealist aesthetics, spirituality, and political rhetoric. The latter references inflect *Far beyond the Stars* with priorities that are evident throughout Barnes’s work. In the following pages, I offer an outline of the terrain on which Barnes’s writings stand within the field of paraliterary authorship to account for his portrayal of Benny Russell as a literary ancestor of contemporary Black SF writers.

Barnes includes an author’s note in *Far beyond the Stars* that offers a window onto his creative process. In a pattern that I have noted throughout this book, Barnes describes his distinctly racialized and gendered position within the SF audience as the point of departure for his approach to authorship:

I was born in 1952, and if there is any most central reason I began to write, it is that there was no father in my home, and I needed to find images of men doing manly stuff. My mom did the best she could, but she was (very much) a woman, and simply couldn’t teach me certain things. So I looked

to the stories of Conan the Barbarian, and Mike Hammer, and James Bond, and Leslie Charteris's *The Saint*. And there was something very interesting about all of these he-man worlds: no black people needed apply.³¹

Barnes found viable resources in the fantasy and adventure fare of film and television as a youth, but he only found himself in part through those media, just as he attests to forming a self-concept in part through his mother's strong influence. The extent to which Barnes discounts his mother's knowledge may be more significant when understood as a symptom of the mind-set that grew out of his relationship to the dominant cultural landscape rather than the cause of his attraction to it. The example of Conan the Barbarian is instructive, in this regard, as the legacy of that strain of fiction sheds light on the questions of gender, race, and genre that emerge in Barnes's writing and that of his interlocutors.

As I am arguing throughout this book, interpretations of the past shaped by attention to racial oppression as a driving force in history differentiate some SF works by Black authors from those of writers focusing on the present, the future, and alternate realities from other points of view. Barnes writes about the future in *Far beyond the Stars* as well as another novelization-like text, a story in the *Deep Space Nine* tie-in collection, *The Lives of Dax*. He has also written for the Star Wars franchise, which takes place in the distant past; his tie-in novels, *The Cestus Deception* and *The Hive*, explore developments within the Clone Wars saga that forms part of the backstory of George Lucas's Star Wars films. With its setting, "in a galaxy far, far away," Star Wars makes its occasional resemblances to the history of the planet Earth uncanny at best, coincidental at least. Unlike in Star Trek, frontier discoveries, political intrigues, and interplanetary itineraries of Star Wars are *not* meant to depict a possible future that follows chronologically from events in the real world where contemporary readers and viewers live. A more salient thread throughout Barnes's own writings, arising separately from but also woven throughout the plots of his adaptations and collaborations, is the conceptualization of past events on the planet Earth in which people of African descent play a central role. In more than a dozen novels about Black heroic figures envisioned on an epic scale, Barnes engages in a mode of speculation that calls attention to problematic patterns observed in some SF subgenres.

Robert Howard's Conan stories spring from a reservoir of tropes for civilization and savagery that links them to SF forerunner Edgar Rice Burroughs. As Sharon DeGraw has noted, Burroughs's Tarzan and his John

Carter of Mars fiction delivered prevailing racial and gender ideologies to young readers at a moment shortly before the pulp magazines and paperback novels coalesced into the form that would come to be known as science fiction.³² Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* followed in their footsteps. Both of these mythologies, Conan and Tarzan, speak to a shared imaginary invested in what Bradley Deane has called "primitive masculinity," an imperialistic ideal that upends the valorization of "civilized" restraint in favor of a conflict-driven, desirous appetite for conquest and an affinity with colonized people's otherwise-debased qualities. Primitive masculinity surfaces in fiction of the "lost world" variety, a strain of fantasy that imagines the human past as a repository of repressed but desirable qualities that aid in superior civilizations' triumph over their rivals. Imperialist appropriations of the "barbarian" figure, otherwise understood as Western civilization's Other, allowed political figures such as Cecil Rhodes and celebrated authors such as Rudyard Kipling to embrace violence in the service of transcendent aims: the glory of God, country, and the (White) race. Although Deane constrains his examples to Victorian British writing, he addresses Burroughs as the American equivalent of Arthur Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard; all of the preceding, like the later Howard, employ the setting of a lost world to display masculine values and tactics that attest to White superiority.³³

Generations of Black writers have pointed out how the various discourses from Orientalism to the notion of primitive masculinity have become solidly ensconced in popular media through latter-day mythologies including "lost world" fiction. Barnes gestures toward the power of these myths in an interview about his own use of heroic figures and mythic tropes:

I set out to create modern myths for those who didn't have them. When I was growing up, I found a way to find such myths in Tarzan, in Conan. Even though they were insulting, and contained some tremendously damaging images, I found a way to reach past them, and connect. But not everyone can do this, and I wanted to find a way to give them that.³⁴

Elaborating on his afterword to *Far beyond the Stars*, Barnes frames his writing as an expedition into the subject formation of readers like himself: Black readers who may not have found role models with whom to identify in popular culture. Barnes's comments highlight how White readers have imbibed the potential identified with their own racial identity while tacitly perpetuating the alienation of people of color. His work

to redress this disparity exposes the way in which fantastic imagery has stabilized oppressive ideology, but he does not convey an interest in displacing existing representations from their prominence. In a maneuver that coincides with but does not necessarily affirm the counterdiscursive strategy of feminist SF writers and critics, such as Jewelle Gomez, he authors a countermyth instead.

The reparative impulse that informs Barnes's appropriation of heroic fantasy resembles a movement that authors Charles Saunders and Brother Uraeus have called "sword and soul." Inaugurated, according to Saunders, by his writings in the 1970s, sword and soul is a response to the "sword and sorcery" fantasy fiction identified with Howard's Conan tales. In a discussion of the central conundrum in Howard's legacy that resembles Barnes's comments, Saunders writes,

Racism, in the form of white supremacy, was an integral part of the popular culture of the early decades of the twentieth century, and as such it pervaded pulp fiction. As a product of a later time during which the tenets of racism came under vigorous challenge, my enjoyment of fiction from past decades was often compromised by the racial attitudes I encountered in my reading. . . .

A character came into my head then: Imaro, a black man who could stand alongside mythical warrior-heroes like Beowulf and Hercules, as well as fictional creations such as Conan and Kull [of Atlantis].³⁵

Saunders's Imaro novels feature an African continent in an alternative historical frame of reference characterized by the presence of enduring (but fictionalized) indigenous folkways and ongoing supernatural intervention, on one hand, and the absence of European nationalism and colonialism, on the other. While an inheritance including romances and travel narratives is legible throughout sword and soul stories like those in the collection *Griots*, edited by Saunders and Milton Davis, ethnographic, autoethnographic, and magical realist modes of representation situate the sword and soul as an explicit rejoinder to the "lost world" genre's topography. Whereas sword and sorcery fiction incorporates supernatural elements as the hallmark of ancient and antimodern locations, a distinctly diasporic temporality links the signature tropes of sword and soul to a speculative fiction of Blackness that will be familiar to readers acquainted with the Black Arts movement. The reinvention of language, contemporary myth making, and radical intellectual practice that characterized the Black Arts movement signals a rejection of the distinction between modernity

and its Others in favor of a reinvigorated cultural totality among people of African descent.

Gestures including the representation of initiation rites, secret societies, proverbs, and rivalries in sword and soul fiction—which may be emphatically rhetorical, like the name Saunders chooses for the setting of his stories (Nyumbani, “from the Swahili word for home”) or historically based, like Maurice Broaddus’s “Lost Son,” which invokes the peoples of the Niger delta—link the genre to high-concept productions like Amiri Baraka’s polemically pseudo-scientific *Black Mass*.³⁶ The two schools of thought, Black Arts and sword and soul, militate against ways of knowing that have proven instrumental to White supremacy. They dismantle existing genre distinctions to question the racist, capitalist, and religious predicates of modern intellectual institutions. As a consequence of stylizing its transformation of cultural production after the fashion of the Black Arts movement, however, sword and soul takes part in a repertoire that pertains more and more to one side of a growing generation gap, with the hip-hop or post-soul generation on the other.³⁷

Whereas sword and soul casts off the racist baggage of the past to make it useful for Black writers to draw upon, Barnes projects the speculative quality of knowledge formations associated with Blackness into the future. For Barnes and other writers whose work posits the speculative fiction of Blackness, the imperative of rewriting the past is not born out of naive utopianism or ahistorical nihilism. As Nabeel Zuberi notes, the anachronistic and discordant consciousness displayed across theories of diaspora, Afrofuturism, literature, and music is a feature and not a flaw. Faced with the impossible task of isolating historical evidence for their humanity, formerly enslaved peoples have crafted alternatives to realism and positivism as approaches to history. The speculative fiction of Blackness mines resources as disparate as the Blackbirds of 1928 and ethnographies of the Dogon people of Mali—both of which surface in *Far beyond the Stars*—in an inspired search for lessons to inform future endeavors rather than as an investment in truth claims for their own sake. Zuberi describes this pursuit through the enigmatic phrase “construction of future pasts.”³⁸

Barnes speaks of his collaborations with well-known SF writers as lessons in taking ownership over the process of envisioning the future. In his several works cowritten with Larry Niven, author of the Ringworld novels, and Jerry Pournelle, a space opera writer in the mold of Asimov—both of whom are known for neoconservative leanings—Barnes contributes to a forward-looking revision of ancient and modern mythologies.³⁹ With the

exception of his first book-length collaboration with Larry Niven, *The Descent of Anansi*, Barnes's work with White SF authors tends to rely on tropes derived from European and Anglo-American frames of reference. The titular conceit of *Descent of Anansi*, interestingly, is a spacecraft suspended in orbit via a cable manufactured by nanotechnology. It takes its name from an Akan trickster figure brought to the attention of Europeans by colonial contact and slave trading with the Asante Empire. The stories were popularized in North America and the Caribbean during Atlantic slavery, and they were remediated in the twentieth century by children's books. The modern conceit of the space elevator emerged with golden age SF writer Arthur C. Clarke. With heroes of his own design, Barnes identifies virtues that are not quite golden. In his Aubry Knight novels (*Street-lethal*, *Gorgon Child*, and *Firedance*), he depicts a culturally syncretistic, technologically augmented martial arts form and an individualistic as well as community-focused moral journey from crime to preservation. Barnes draws on martial arts experience in his own life as a means to cope with the influences of a violent environment. Evoking the reparative emphasis that martial arts and Black Power-era health activism share, Barnes refers to self-discipline as a means to forestall illness: "The physical threat of negative emotions—stress, certain forms of cancer, all kinds of autoimmune disease—is immense."⁴⁰ Barnes's later works and his collaborations with his wife, horror writer Tananarive Due, bring race thinking to the foreground of cautionary tales about scientific progress gone awry, where they have always played a part.⁴¹ In *Charisma*, for instance, a tale about literally imprinting the personality of a Booker T. Washington-like figure onto the minds of African American youths, Barnes addresses the perils of attempting to limit the meaning of Blackness in ways that amount to severing Black people from their humanity, physically and psychologically.

The most elaborate manifestations of Barnes's attention to the intersection of race thinking and mythology are two sets of novels, *Great Sky Woman* and *Shadow Valley*, thematized by their setting in the Rift Valley, and *Lion's Blood* and *Zulu Heart*, which construct an alternate history of Islamic African settler colonialism in North America. The former have shades of Imaro, but the fictionalized version of Mount Kilimanjaro that anchors them geographically situates them in a distant past rather than a parallel universe. The latter participates in the more profound genre-bending practice of alternate history. *Lion's Blood* and *Zulu Heart* reverse certain historical relationships, setting Islamic Africans in the role of New World colonists and casting White Europeans with Christian heritage into

diaspora through an alternate version of the Atlantic slave trade. His narrative takes up significant religious questions while also offering an example of a strategy for mediating race thinking in speculative fiction that Isiah Lavender has called “meta-slavery.” Lavender’s astute reading suggests that the novels in which Barnes narrates racial formation, slavery, and emancipation in a world turned upside down are not fundamentally about the past at all. Rather, by combining features of speculative fiction, the slave narrative tradition, and neoslave narratives, meta-slavery fiction such as David Brin’s *Kiln People* and the novels by Barnes “demonstrates how slavery lives on in our cultural awareness and helps us ask how to deal with this history.”⁴²

Critiques of modern historical discourse, such as those of Hayden White, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, might find Barnes’s interventions akin to the “histories-from-below” authored by the likes of Michael Gomez (*Exchanging Our Country Marks*) rather than to SF masterpieces such as Philip K. Dick’s *Man in the High Castle*.⁴³ Like Marlene Barr’s theory of “feminist fabulation,” conceptualizing alternative history as a rubric that dissociates SF works from their genre peers in order to identify them with more elevated knowledge projects, such as postmodernism, calls attention to how urgent it seems for some critics to liberate themselves from the “golden ghetto.” Rather than a preoccupation with the marginality of speculative fiction as a genre, however, I would argue that Barnes’s reason for remediating history in *Lion’s Blood* and *Zulu Heart* is to cement his readers’ awareness of the determinative impact of Atlantic slavery and global White supremacy on the making of the modern world. Like George Schuyler’s *Black Empire*, Barnes’s writing presents an account of racial oppression that reverses the positions of the parties involved to suggest that it was what happened, and not to whom it happened, that matters. With the same orientation toward the interpretation of history, in *Far beyond the Stars*, Barnes authors a “future past” in which we can imagine Benny Russell as part of science fiction and Star Trek’s history.

Authoring Novelization

Barnes’s most distinctive contribution to the set of texts that converge in *Far beyond the Stars* is a backstory for Benny Russell that explains how he became a science fiction writer. Young Benny functions as a twentieth-century counterpart to Captain Sisko as a result of a series of events that Barnes draws from the historical situation of Black youth in the United

States and the history of science fiction. As in the version of his story seen by television viewers, the adult Benny Russell of the novelization begins his fateful journey into the world of Star Trek once he sets eyes on a drawing of the space station we know as Deep Space Nine. Russell decides to write a story about the space station, and he becomes embroiled in an argument with his editor upon learning that he and Kay will be excluded from the staff photo. The drama begins to unfold with the same dialogue used on television. Herbert Rossoff remarks, sarcastically, “Well. If the world’s not ready for a woman writer—imagine what would happen if it learned about a Negro with a typewriter—run for the hills!”⁴⁴ In another voice, however, the narrator probes Russell’s innermost thoughts:

*But in that darkness again, everything was different. He wasn't a black man surrounded by whites. He was an Earth man, one of three in the room: O'Brien, Bashir, and the others. They were, in comparison with the aliens, closer than triplets. But even with that genetic and cultural gulf, he and all of those in the room—Dax, Odo, Kira, Bashir and O'Brien—they were all, if not friends, comrades. . . . In another time, the petty differences meant less than nothing.*⁴⁵

Barnes superimposes the characters of *Deep Space Nine* directly onto their twentieth-century counterparts in this passage, signaling that Benny Russell perceives his troubled life in relation to a utopian future. The abrupt shift in narration, in which “he wasn’t a black man surrounded by whites,” effaces Benny’s racial identity to describe the world of Star Trek as a future grounded by the kinship of human beings in which Earth men of different backgrounds are “closer than triplets.” At two points during this scene in the novel, italics inflect the protagonist’s actions with the content of his unvoiced thoughts. This first passage orients the reader to Russell’s hopes, situating *Deep Space Nine* and Star Trek writ large as a longed-for alternative to the race-conscious twentieth century.

Pabst attempts to defuse the tension by reminding Russell, “It’s only a photograph.” The narrator describes Russell’s reaction, focusing on the expression on his face. As Russell’s eyes lock into a stare, the thought that resonates in his head contains the words of his mother, who is not evoked in this fashion during the television episode. Benny recalls his mother’s words:

*When I was a girl we couldn't look no white folks dead in their eyes. That made them think that you thought you were as good as them. They don't like that. Little black boys who acted like that used to get lynched.*⁴⁶

In the time it would take for Avery Brooks to narrow his eyes on screen, the reader is oriented to read the simmering confrontation between Benny Russell and Pabst through the lens of Benny's upbringing as a Black youth. The reader's attention moves from this single moment in Russell's adult life to others, from his childhood, signaling that the two contexts are linked in the protagonist's mind. The thought rendered on the page signals to the reader that Russell's silence does not indicate his refusal or inability to react but rather his choice to react through introspection.

In the novel, the sequence in which Russell and Kay are excluded from the group photo of the *Incredible Tales* staff ends with a "glittering model" on a colleague's desk catching Benny's eye.⁴⁷ In his moment of vulnerability, the sight of the model for the Trylon Tower, a skyscraping spire built for the 1939 World's Fair, triggers Benny's recollection of a formative episode from his youth:

What had just happened had been humiliating. It had been a basic denial of his humanity. Why did he subject himself to this crap? Why? What was it that drove him, that pushed him to scratch black ink on white paper, to take his private dreams and offer them up to a world that cared not a damn for the dreamer?

Why couldn't he just walk away from it all? He had asked himself that question a thousand times, and had no answer.

Except . . .

The Trylon . . .

*SHUFFLE*⁴⁸

A change of perspective takes place as Russell and the reader move from perceiving a small souvenir from the World's Fair, an objective representation, to Russell's memory of experiencing the fair during his youth, a subjective rendition of the event. The next chapter resumes with the title "**JULY, 1940**" in large bold print and the opening sentence, "Summer in Harlem, 1940, was an oasis of calm for Benny Russell."⁴⁹ From italics, to bold italics, to large bold print, and back to standard font and case, recognizable markers of emphasis in print gradually reorient the reader in time and space.

In 1940, Young Benny gazes up at the actual Trylon Tower instead of down at the statuette of it. Emphasizing his stature, Barnes writes, "His gangly body . . . too light for football, too slow for basketball."⁵⁰ Benny and his cohorts, all Black youths, depart from a Harlem community center. Whereas their exclusion from the Columbian Exposition in 1893 impelled

Black Americans to stage a protest, and a Black fair took place in Chicago to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of emancipation, the New York Fair included a week of events in 1940 extolling the contributions of Black Americans. Benny attends the fair to see Bill “Bojangles” Robinson dance, but according to one of his cohorts, the Fair’s Hall of Nations was offering another event of interest that week: displays of African cultures. Upon his arrival at the fair, Benny becomes overwhelmed, and as “the complex and confusing maze of passages between exhibits, the constant barrage of sights and sounds,” assails his senses, “his mind sought some central object to focus on, and found it in the central structures: the Trylon and the Perisphere.”⁵¹ Guided by the modern architectural wonders that heralded the “World of Tomorrow” theme of the fair’s 1939 debut, Benny Russell experiences the fair as an orientation to the iconography of his career as an SF writer. As a backdrop for Russell’s initiation to science fiction, the site that opened in 1939 was an appropriate setting: the first-ever World Science Fiction Convention was held concurrently with the opening of the fair in 1939.⁵²

As he encounters a vision of the future for the first time, Benny is transfixed by it in the same way he would be enthralled by the drawing of the space station once he became a writer for *Incredible Tales*. Guided by the Trylon and Perisphere, young Benny navigates the fairground with a sense of wonder. This process culminates in a rendition of Russell *becoming* Sisko through his immersion in the language of science fiction. At the invitation of a friend, Benny aspires to see an intriguing artifact in the Hall of Nations exhibit. This course of events will eventually bring him face-to-face with the Bajoran Prophets, extraterrestrial spiritual figures who represent divine intervention in *Deep Space Nine*. Readers of *Far beyond the Stars*, if they are viewers of *Deep Space Nine*, will recognize the reference to a “crystal hourglass” by Benny’s friend as evidence of the Prophets’ presence.⁵³ In *Deep Space Nine*, such an hourglass-shaped crystal is one of several “orbs” with the inexplicable power to induce visions of the Bajoran Prophets in the minds of persons exposed to them. When young Benny’s friend Cooley refers to the prospect of seeing this crystal orb, in an exhibit from the Dogon people of West Africa, he foreshadows Benny’s encounter with the Prophets.

Sisko’s visions from the Bajoran Prophets in *Deep Space Nine* impel him on his mission throughout the series. In both the televised and novelized versions of the text, when Sisko begins to see himself as Benny Russell, his family members initially believe he is having a vision from the

Prophets. In Barnes's version of events, the Prophets' communication with young Benny Russell in the twentieth century not only connects him to his future incarnation as Sisko but also links Africans to Black Americans.

Young Benny contacts the Bajoran Prophets when, impelled by curiosity, he returns to the site of the World's Fair and discovers the mysterious exhibition at the Hall of Nations. Upon viewing the crystal hourglass described earlier, Benny perceives apparitions with his own likeness from different historical moments in the past and future. The vision situates Benny Russell from 1940 alongside "an infinite string of Bennys" whose experiences Russell understands as his own.⁵⁴ He witnesses his ancestors struggling through slavery and the Middle Passage, and then he sees their predecessors living in farms and villages of their own. In one vision, he finds himself fishing on a West African shore when a vessel from space crashes violently before him. In his ancient incarnation, Benny attempts to rescue a space traveler from the broken ship. Before the injured pilot dies, he gives Benny the artifact (a crystal hourglass) he was carrying on board. Subsequently, Benny envisions himself as Captain Sisko. By appending a past to the future outlined for Russell, Barnes secures the continuity of his character's historical roots—and, by extension, his racial identity. Weaving the Bajoran artifact into Benny's history thus links human racial relations to the alien species portrayed in *Star Trek*, making the science fiction pretext of Benny's journey through his racial past a path of continuity rather than a digression.

To a greater degree than its iteration on television, the story told in Barnes's adaptation specifies the protagonist's perspective according to his racial identity, time period, location, and age. The specific prerogatives of constructing Black American identity and staging a critique of racism are the features that distinguish *Far beyond the Stars* from the texts it adapts, and Barnes articulates these prerogatives in a concerted fashion.

The Multiplication of Registers

Barnes's extensive departures from the teleplay, the informing text common to his adaptation and its televised product, dispense with the question of fidelity. Young Benny's exposure to the Bajoran Prophets is a subplot unique to the novel, and it appears self-contained at first. Benny Russell's destiny, however, will become entwined with that of Ben Sisko through developments within this subplot. The novelization alternates between the settings of 1953, 1940, and the twenty-fourth century to establish

continuities between them rather than comparing a deficient racial past to a promising future. The continuity effects of Avery Brooks's performance as both Sisko and Russell on television are achieved through other means in *Far beyond the Stars*. The additional time frame of 1940 sutures Benny Russell's relationship to Ben Sisko by linking them both to the fictitious peoples who populate the cosmos in *Star Trek* and also to the African ancestors of Black Americans.

Before Russell can discover that he is linked to Ben Sisko in the future, however, he must write the Captain into being. After Russell averts his eyes from the nostalgia-evoking model of the Trylon Tower in the office of *Incredible Tales*, he takes his story assignment and heads home to Harlem. He exits the scene of his humiliation only to be faced with two unpleasantly familiar individuals. Two police officers who accost Benny Russell on the street conjure troubling images. In an episode similar to the premonition he experienced in the magazine's office, Russell again sees the people around him as characters from *Deep Space Nine*:

He blinked. For a moment one of them—the one whose name badge read Ryan—momentarily fluttered, and another man stood in his place. Then it wasn't a man at all. It was a creature with ridged facial skin, and a high wall of muscle from shoulders to neck. And the name of this person was . . . Gul Dukat. They had been nemeses. . . .

The other wore a name badge saying Mulkahey. And again, he shimmered . . . and took on another form. Weyoun, a . . . "Vorta."⁵⁵

Actors Marc Alaimo and Jeffrey Combs portray the aforementioned Dukat and Weyoun, leaders of the villainous empire that seeks to capture the planet Bajor where *Deep Space Nine* is located and subdue the Federation of Planets. They appear in the "Far beyond the Stars" episode as Benny Russell's human antagonists, White police officers Ryan and Mulkahey, without their makeup. The version of this encounter in the novel fully replaces Ryan and Mulkahey, temporarily, with their twenty-fourth-century counterparts. The television episode uses the consistency of actors' physical appearances to portray Russell and his nemeses in positions analogous to those of Captain Sisko and his rivals. Without recourse to this technique in print, Barnes achieves something different: he weaves the encounter with Ryan and Mulkahey into the construction of Russell's altered state of mind. Whereas the television viewer knows something uncanny is taking place, the reader is led to believe the protagonist is losing his grip on reality.

Shaken, Benny Russell goes home. He begins to write the story of the deep space outpost in the drawing, where a captain named Sisko commands. Russell looks up from his typewriter expecting to see his own face, but looking back at him, he sees the character he has just invented with a face like his own:

*Captain Benjamin Sisko sat looking out the window of Deep Space Nine, his ebony reflection staring back at him. There was a job to do, but as with all men, sometimes memories of the past intruded upon the present. These memories were painful. Any memory of the only woman he had ever loved was painful. And yet he would not have given them up for all the Tarkelean Tea in the Galaxy.*⁵⁶

This passage is the only segment of the text-within-a-text at the center of “The Cold and Distant Stars” in any medium that represents Russell in the act of describing Sisko as a Black character. With the phrase “his ebony reflection,” Barnes concretizes the event that will determine Benny Russell’s fate, giving form to the controversy of a Black hero in 1950s science fiction. In light of the recollections from his childhood, his ongoing struggles with discrimination, and his troubled mind, in the novel, Russell’s choice to envision himself as the protagonist appears related to his racially specific experiences and to his experience of a universe populated with extraterrestrial intelligence and future space exploration.

The other writers at *Incredible Tales* admire Russell’s story immensely. Yet the magazine’s editor, Pabst, insists that a story with a colored captain will displease their publisher and upset the sensibilities of their readership. Macklin resolves the impasse by suggesting that Russell make his story the dream of a Black youth imagining his way out of an appropriately modest setting.⁵⁷ At the news that he will be paid a handsome three cents a word for his efforts, Russell shares the news and plans a celebration with his love interest, Cassie. A tragedy ensues with Russell’s idealism reined in by the hazards of racial disquiet.

Though Russell’s White colleagues have come around, it is his young Black friend Jimmy who says, when Russell presents his idea for a story with a Black protagonist, “A coon on the moon?”⁵⁸ Jimmy’s comment, as rendered in the teleplay and in the broadcast, is “Colored people on the moon?”⁵⁹ Barnes’s rendition of racial vernacular is less sensitive to the contemporary television audience. The exchange between Russell and Jimmy makes it clear that adventures in space are a hard sell to a youth in Jimmy’s circumstances. Jimmy’s position is that of the dreamer in Russell’s story—

discouraged by reality and skeptical about higher aspirations. When Russell encourages him to buy next month's *Incredible Tales* to imagine a better future, Jimmy's pessimistic pragmatism intervenes:

Jimmy's expression had gone from borderline anger to humorous incredulity in a heartbeat. "You mean about colored people on the moon? Bullshit, man. Never happen."

"Check out next month's issue," Benny said conspiratorially.

Something flickered in Jimmy's eyes, something that Benny suspected was genuine amusement. "A coon on the moon?"

"That's not the words I'd use. But we're there."⁶⁰

The happy circumstances of Russell selling his story come to an abrupt end the next time he and Jimmy cross paths. Russell and Cassie emerge onto a Harlem street after dancing the night away in celebration. Their reverie is marred by the sound of gunfire. Cassie implores Benny to head home, but at his direction, they move toward the shots instead. The sight of Jimmy's body finds Benny first in denial, then overwhelmed. Driven to the limit of his senses, his mind explodes into the visionary state he experienced when he saw the Dogon artifact as a young man. Benny imagines a chain of bodies bearing Jimmy's likeness, from the "good Jimmy" who might have avoided the consequences of a life of crime to a succession of identical counterparts, felled by tragedy, all lying in the same pool of blood.

Pushed beyond his usual caution by grief, Benny accosts the police on the scene with questions. The twosome Ryan and Mulkahey shot Jimmy for attempting to steal a car. They show no greater mercy in punishing Russell's indignation. As the police officers on the scene rain blows on the protesting Russell, Barnes allows the violence to cut across the multiple stages of *Far beyond the Stars*, not merely splicing images of Benny's assailants in their fearsome guises from the future into the 1953 scene, as the teleplay instructs, but interpolating two chapters, set on the space station and in 1940, respectively, between moments in Benny's battery. In each instance, the character portrayed as "Benny Russell," whom the readers may visualize as Avery Brooks, loses a figure of importance in his life; first, Captain Sisko sees his son Jake die arbitrarily at the hands of Ryan and Mulkahey's twenty-fourth-century counterparts, Weyoun and Dukat:⁶¹

BENJAMIN SISKO *stood on the Promenade of the space station known as Deep Space Nine. He looked down incredulously at the body laying [sic] limp and unmoving on the floor.*

*The burnt-coffee skin, the face he had kissed so many times, the eyes which were the only remnant of the woman he had loved and lost. He felt as if they were plunging down a hole, falling away from him. His son was dead.*⁶²

This scene is juxtaposed with another tragic interlude in which Russell sees “the woman he had loved and lost” lost again. Young Benny acts too late, in a flashback to 1940, to halt the death of his childhood sweetheart, Jenny. The loss of Jenny, a twentieth-century counterpart for Captain Sisko’s late wife, Jennifer, recapitulates a formative moment in the life of the protagonist of *Deep Space Nine*. Thus the climax of *Far beyond the Stars* spans the settings of the novel, with authorities threatening to foreclose Benny Russell’s future and the repetition of a traumatic incident from the past eclipsing Ben Sisko’s present. Racial violence casts its shadow over Benny Russell’s hope for the future.

Golden Men and Sterling Moments

By transposing the dramatis personae of *Deep Space Nine* into a setting with heightened racial tension, “Far beyond the Stars” demonstrates the political possibilities of adaptation, and the novelization only heightens the intensities of that setting. As I have argued, scenes of struggle, conflict, and violence as well as marked instances of community formation along racial lines make this unique episode amenable to performances that sharpen *Deep Space Nine*’s already visible break from Star Trek’s racial harmony. The additional historical register layered into Barnes’s novelization, however, combines the critical function of those elements already present in “Far beyond the Stars.” Whereas in the screen version of “Far beyond the Stars,” the 1953 setting of *Incredible Tales* functions as an unwritten chapter in the history of print science fiction, Barnes’s *Far beyond the Stars* situates 1953 as a continuation of prior events from 1940. The same logic through which Benny Russell’s travails as a writer appear to prefigure those of his alter ego in the future, Captain Sisko, positions young Benny, in 1940, as the visionary author of the text. His are the youthful aspirations articulated under Benny Russell’s byline in *Incredible Tales*, and his are the dreams Captain Sisko will finally realize. Through Barnes’s adaptive interventions, young Benny’s distinctive role takes on a poignant significance that is further inscribed in the novelization with the death of his counterpart, Jimmy, who deserved to dream of a better future.

At the nexus of race, gender, genre, and age, *Far beyond the Stars* gestures toward the critical work adaptations can achieve. If Star Trek had mystified the circumstances out of which its harmonious vision emerged, “The Cold and Distant Stars” and its remediations sought to reorient the saga to its own stated priorities by interrupting the forward-looking vision of the series with a backward-looking gesture. The past is full of scrapped attempts at articulating a more inclusive vision of the future, but it bears revisiting. The work of adaptation is always reading: it is only meaningful to present a text in a new form or to shift its context as long as it exists for the reader and is constantly in the process of being reread. Readers and viewers update a text with new interpretations, updating its meanings to mark differences in generational contexts and to set successful renditions apart from those that fail. Barnes assumes a challenging agenda in his effort to situate both the production and the reception of *Deep Space Nine* in a moment before it could have possibly been written. His critique of the ways in which the history of speculative fiction has failed readers as well as frustrated writers interested in representing Black manhood is poignant, although his predicates are questionable. Through his work to illustrate of the significance of *Deep Space Nine*, he reminds us that even the most enduring myths are subject to supplementary, reparative reading—and sometimes even visionary critique.

6

DREAMING IN COLOR

Racial Revisions in Fan Fiction

[We] indigenous peoples, people “of colour,” the Other, however we are named, have a presence in the Western imagination, in its fibre and texture, in its sense of itself, in its language, in its silences and shadows, its margins and intersections.

—LINDA TUHIWAI SMITH, *DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES*

TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAKE POPULAR MEDIA and forms of participatory culture readily available to those with access to technology around the world. Transnational capitalism and multilateral military and trade policies seem to eclipse national borders. At the same time, “old” distinctions persist, leaving language, race, and diaspora intact as divisions among peoples, even as their meanings change. In this chapter, I focus on fan fiction as a site at which to probe the tensions among those terms of identification by treating a formation in which they intersect—Blackness—as I have throughout the book: as the subject of dynamic processes lived in many unpredictable ways and mediated, in part, by popular culture. In readings of fan fiction at an online archive, I analyze portrayals of Black-British diasporic characters in popular fantasy narratives. I argue that contemporary understandings of racial and national identities—Black and White, U.S. and British, related through settler colonialism in North America and connected in the present by the tensile thread of the term *diaspora*—and theories of desire that have animated studies of fan fiction mutually benefit from an archive grounded in the reimagined media histories of people of color. The online archive in question, Remember Us, catalogs representations of people of color in popular media through fan

fiction, fan art, and music video, providing a space in which a variety of critical relationships to Blackness appear possible, now and in the future.

The convergence of media technologies has engendered a paradigm shift in the way we view audiences. Instead of relying on models built for the age of radio, television, and print advertising, today it is important to recognize user-driven practices of sharing media and machine-generated algorithms that complicate the equation between individuals in the real world and online personas. Moving away from top-down conceptualizations of the market toward a focus on audience members' self-defined characteristics and usage tendencies was a watershed development in the study of fandom at the end of the twentieth century. Ien Ang's work to reconsider the audiences for television programs such as *Nationwide* and *Dallas* displaced some assumptions about populations across the Anglophone world based on geography, ethnicity, and class; similarly, as I discussed in the introduction, scholars from Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* to Lyn Thomas in *Fans, Feminisms, and Quality Media* have built on feminist, structuralist, and poststructuralist theories to explore how gender has been instrumental to the construction of cultural capital and national identity.

Critical approaches to media, including refinements in the concept of genre and studies of audiences, have flourished as grounded research has illuminated new technologies and proliferating popular narratives. Although *Speculative Blackness* benefits from a rich body of empirical work by other scholars, this chapter continues the emphasis on interpretive strategies that I have maintained throughout this study. Accordingly, I argue that processes reflective of racial formation—specifically, racialized patterns of desiring, meaning making, and critique—are integral to contemporary media and therefore essential to the ongoing transformation of the cultural landscape. Yet scholarship on speculative fiction, and media fandom, in general, has yet to prioritize these issues. One of the most cited interdisciplinary interventions in critical theory in recent years, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, advises that the point of departure for much research on the cultural practices of indigenous peoples shares the same ideological foundations as colonial institutions. Smith's project, to "decolonize" intellectual practice, entails questioning the ways in which the language, epistemology, ontology, social relations, and material practices of colonialism characterize every aspect of academic research endeavors, including the position of investigators. Her insights are relevant, not because they are novel, but because they reiterate

for a decolonial context the questions that must be raised when knowledge formations encounter one another across racial difference, colonial structures, gender ideologies, and other divides as significant as those at work in this chapter: the digital divide and the distinction between producers and consumers.

Smith's critique acknowledges that the so-called Other has always had a presence within the so-called West. Colonial regimes grew out of the exploitation of indigenous resources, and Blackness, at least in the American case, has always posed an insurmountable challenge to Whiteness. Without Blackness, Whiteness could not define itself, and when Blackness takes on meanings contrary to those prescribed by racial subordination, White supremacy reacts. This chapter interrogates the implications of envisioning Blackness in ways that were never intended. My analysis of fan fiction does not read popular narratives "against the grain," but instead it rewrites a global narrative of racial formation by exploring reading practices that invoke Blackness as a spatial and historical frame of reference contrary to the discourses of identification propagated by certain fantastic narratives. The inchoate Black fantastic counterdiscourse outlined in this chapter confronts some of the contradictions embedded in the global cultural imaginary.¹ I have maintained attention to these contradictions throughout this study, in a way, through the notion of the Whiteness of science fiction. Now, I am examining variations on the speculative fiction of Blackness, namely, fans' portrayals of Black British-diasporic women that dislodge tropes of fantasy from a British cultural frame of reference that is presumptively identical to Whiteness. Instead, these narratives identify Blackness with the supernatural through historical and speculative knowledge rooted in *diaspora*. The use of fan fiction toward that end is an unanticipated development amid other transformations accounted for by scholarship on media in the information age.

Decolonizing Cyberspace

As the Internet developed into its present form, a sense that the world was "getting smaller" produced seductive fantasies about becoming interconnected through technology's penetration into exotic locales. These fantasies had their dark side, for all parties involved. Nightmares of capital unbridled by the limits of space and time accompanied paranoid efforts to fortify national and class power centers against the incursions of the multitude. Writing for the 1990s in *Technoculture*, Constance Penley and

Andrew Ross lamented the polarization that had come to characterize political critiques on the subject of technology and culture. The irresistible march of technology would not necessarily leave the liberal democracies of the Global North entrenched in a system of “rationality and domination,” where “looking for signs of resistance is like looking for leftover meat in a lion’s cage,” nor would advancing technologies necessarily flow down a one-way stream to the Third World and doom us all to the fate of the market.² Instead, *Technoculture* collected recent essays on “*actually existing technoculture* in Western society, where the new cultural technologies have penetrated deepest.”³ By limiting their horizons to developments that had already taken place, the authors made it clear that their claims were contingent rather than prophetic. While their critique of technological determinism pointed the way out of teleological fantasies regarding the globalization of new forms of mediated culture, globalization itself was a foregone conclusion. There was no doubt that we were all going online, and that the study of technology and culture would demand a global scope, but we ought not prejudge the meaning of our incipient interconnectedness, for better or for worse.

Technoculture included one of the most influential studies of fan fiction, Penley’s “Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology.” The essay displays a lacuna in scholarship at the intersection of media fandom and new technology. Whereas the volume’s itinerary begins at Tiananmen Square and moves through UNESCO, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Viet Nam in the introduction, “Brownian Motion” restricted its vision of participatory culture to White women, despite the explicitly interracial narrative promoted by the source text (*Star Trek*) that their writing invoked. Alongside the otherwise-valuable inferences that the essay draws about the conceptualization of space in media fandom, its failure to account for the racial politics of popular media in the era of advanced technology stands out as a contradiction that studies of technology and culture had yet to reconcile at the time of the collection’s writing. Inquiry into technoculture portrays globalization as its context, but the political and economic forces that set the new world in motion emanate from and reverberate beyond those spaces where emergent cultural technologies have penetrated deepest.

A few years later, a related study, *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*, sought to bridge the gap between technology, race, and culture. The late twentieth century produced new ways to understand social relations, just as it produced new venues for cultural production, but the

meanings of these developments remained in flux. Unwilling to accept the rhetoric of access to technology as a panacea, *Technicolor* examined the meaning of actually existing technoculture in the lives of users marginalized by race. “How will we know when the digital divide has been mended. . . . How much technological access amounts to equality?” they asked, pointing out that fantasies of liberation through access, even if they took on the practical objective of enfranchising users of color, failed to consider how people of color inhabited relationships to technology outside of an on-off binary.⁴ The contributors to *Technicolor* addressed the possibility that going online is not enough. Instead, they asked, what happens after we appear in cyberspace? By repopulating virtual spaces, not just with racialized bodies but with new meanings, users of color engage in technological practices that *reterritorialize* the media landscape, taking back the means of production in the information age from the forces that had countenanced their exclusion.

Though we are moving away from the scope of their predictions, the aforementioned studies identify several trends worth drawing into conversation for the purpose of imagining the future of Blackness. First, the infrastructure of popular media is always changing. As important as it was to reflect on how dead media set the conditions for disseminating race thinking and articulating the concept of genre in my first chapter, I now consider the ways in which users appropriate meanings and their expression from the field of cultural production today. Second, the unfulfilled promise of access is not the only problem that commands imaginative responses from those of us seeking to bridge various digital divides. Rather, we have to reckon with the self-defined needs that contemporary users articulate and seek to fulfill in spaces of representation such as fan fiction online. Those needs include redefining genre and Blackness.

Academic research on speculative fiction and media has demonstrated increasing aptitude with respect to understanding issues of technology and representation in general. Scholarly studies demonstrating this include Scott Bukatman’s *Terminal Identity* and Rhiannon Bury’s *Cyberspaces of Their Own*. Another, equally important factor called for in our present context, however, is attention to critiques of race thinking that have developed in tandem and in tension with our changing cultural landscape. As I have argued throughout the book, the latter has confounded research on speculative fiction more often than not. Yet, as I have also argued, searching scholarship is only one way to address these quandaries. I have also felt the need to continue drawing on praxis from audiences by acknowledging

that interpretation itself informs and contributes to cultural production: fans produce texts. It is therefore telling, regarding fans and scholars alike, to see relatively little attention to issues of race in studies of media fandom, because it suggests that fans are not thinking critically about race.

Scholarship on popular culture from an African Americanist perspective, conversely, helps us reconstruct our knowledge of how audiences shape the cultural landscape. In her contribution to *Black Queer Studies* on Black lesbian and gay film, Kara Keeling points out that visibility has not necessarily played an essential role in Black queer interventions in media. Contrary to a prevailing paradigm that frames the intersection of Black and lesbian/gay subjectivities in scholarship by suggesting visibility is principally important, the body of knowledge that Black lesbian and gay film composes was never “conceived as an essentialized category and subsequently corrupted with white queer practices, including queer theory, into an ambivalent, destabilizing and unstable force of identification and desire that results in a critical politics.”⁵ She cites Stuart Hall’s analysis for this formulation. According to Hall, Black cultural politics has moved over time from a focus on the “relations of representation” to the “politics of representation,” in which demands shift from inclusion within existing representational paradigms to meaningful agency that allows for the contestation of dominant ideologies inscribed in and through representation, including contesting the value of supposedly positive images produced at that earlier phase. The impact of Black lesbian and gay film, in Keeling’s view, is not a new representation but a critique of “existing constructions of black subjectivity and of lesbian and gay subjectivity simultaneously.” The lesson of this study, for my purposes, is that conceptualizing how marginalized subjects overcome barriers to “joining” existing cultural traditions should not always be the focus of a critique of cultural production. Instead, it can be more instructive to observe how users orient their participation toward unexpected aims.

Like Keeling, Anna Everett notes that actually existing uses of media and technology upset predictions we might have made regarding racialized, gendered, and place-bound subject formations in the information age. In *Digital Diaspora*, Everett writes of the unprecedented success of Black American women as Web users with the organization of the Million Woman March of 1997. In addition, she points to the network Naijanet as the prototype for a “postindependence conceptualization of a virtual Nigerian consanguinity,” a form of nationalism and political participation

unbounded by the nation's laws and territorial boundaries.⁶ While these innovations demonstrate the possibility of envisioning community in new ways through globalized media cultures, I would suggest that it remains important to problematize the workings of “Black secret technologies” in the era of globalization: recognizing Blackness as a transformative influence on the production of the future is not the same as suggesting that Blackness is inherently surreptitiously futuristic. We should question the extent to which imputing oppositional efficacy to marginalization—under the aegis of subversion, subjugated knowledge, and hacking—churns up and recycles the exclusions and violence of the past. It may be just as useful to consider these interventions as emphatically public in nature and enlist them in a critique of the speculative fiction of Blackness, rethinking the relationship between race and genre rather than reinforcing it.

In 2004, I joined an online social network for the purpose of sharing and commenting on fan fiction. Years before I decided to write a book about speculative fiction and media from an African Americanist perspective, I developed an affinity for the work of a fanfic writer and editor, and I volunteered to take over the duties of maintaining one of her online archives. The task was laden with meaning; the archive was called Remember Us. Its implicit purpose is the acknowledgment that people of color are present throughout popular media and significant to many participants in media fandom. The mission statement of the archive is titled “The Remember Us Manifesto.” I will quote from that document here:

I want people to think about what they're doing when they're cannibalizing media. To consider the reasons—whatever they may be—why they leave the darker characters to rot on the big buffet of fandom as they consume everything White. I want people to feel just as comfortable objectifying Adebisi [a Black character in the TV series *Oz*] as they do Keller [a White character]. I want people to acclimatize themselves to the idea of characters of color being valid objects of lust/affection/whatever *period*, and move beyond the terror of the terrible pointing finger.

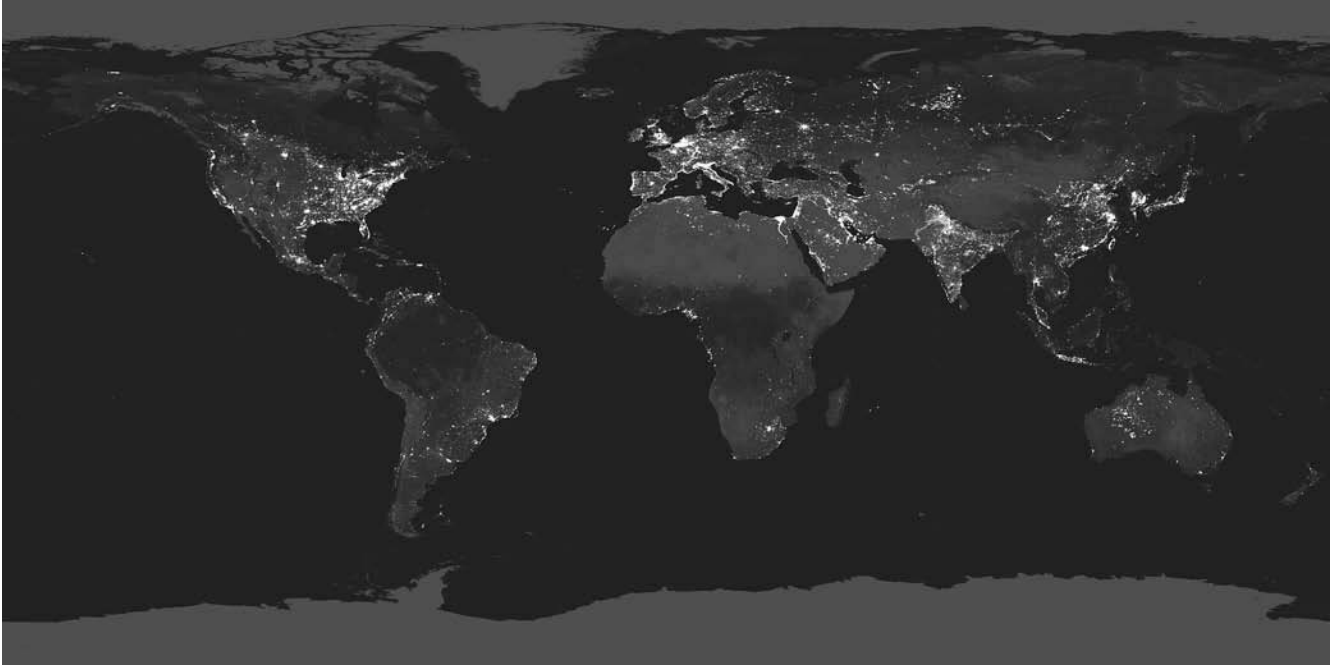
The fact is, some people will call you names no matter what you do.

Is race a matter of phenotype, geography, and attendant power differentials? Most of the time, and in many ways, I'd have to say yes. If this was a less shallow archive, we might address those issues. As it is . . . we're shallow. And I think that before we move into the upper level sociology courses, there's a distinct need for people to *see* that there's something to talk sociology about.⁷

Like the editors of *Technoculture* and *Technicolor*, I did not misconstrue a spectacle of new media as a resource sufficient to resist the dominant tendencies of global capitalism and White supremacy. I assumed the mantle of an amateur archivist because it was a source of pleasure. Yet upon realizing that my peers might not even see material disparities, varied identifications, and political divergences influenced by racism and responses to it as important features of our information culture, upon noting that many observers might not know there are Black people in *Harry Potter*, Black people in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Black lesbian and Black gay fans and scholars like this author, I recognized that they were drawing on ill-informed histories: histories upheld by an archive of White supremacist fantasies that hide the face of participatory culture from itself. Our conversation about the relationship between race and culture must begin, as the “Remember Us Manifesto” states, with the admission that there is something to talk about.

Thinking Globally

“It bears repetition that ‘race,’ ethnicity, nation and culture are not interchangeable terms,” Paul Gilroy reminds us in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*.⁸ If we understand race and ethnicity as matters of collective identification, invoked as well as disclaimed on the basis of phenotype and history, and if we explain the category of “nation” as an “imagined community” maintained along geopolitical borders through communication across distances, culture stands apart as a term that implies mediating practices, forms of capital, and habits of everyday life which meanings are not quite transposable onto the aforementioned categories. I chose to examine Black British–diasporic characters in recent popular fantasy narratives because they raise questions about the persistence of racial distinctions despite the waning influence of nationality as a category of analysis in cultural interpretation. Diaspora provides a historical background for inquiries into the meaning of contemporary globalization; rather than emphasizing cyberculture in isolation, we might think about our new mediated interconnectedness as the latest in a series of overlapping waves that have reconfigured populations across the planet for centuries. As Gilroy insists, Black Britain has a unique history of its own, but it also builds on diasporic formations situated elsewhere: “the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for the creative processes that redefine what it means to be black,



Another view of the world: “The Black Marble,” a composite view of night on Earth illuminated by artificial light, created by the NASA/NOAA Suomi National Polar-Orbiting Partnership satellite (Suomi NPP) in 2012. Photograph by NASA.

adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and re-made.”⁹

To investigate contemporary representations of Black British subjects in fantasy novels, television, film, and works of fan fiction, I am making use of critical insights that the editors of *Race in Cyberspace* pointed out a decade ago. They observed that “academic work on cyberspace has been surprisingly silent around questions of race and racism,” but more importantly, in recounting their attempts to bring their appreciation for the specificity of racial identities into everyday conversations in online venues, they found that prevailing discourse on technoculture actively maintains this silence.¹⁰ In their estimation at the time of their writing, “the bulk of the growing body of literature in cyberspace studies has focused on only a handful of issues and arguments, in ways that have effectively directed the conversation on cyberculture away from questions of race.” Thus, they point out, scholarship on cyberculture maintains White supremacist assumptions, but not because Anglo–North American people of color tend to lack access to technology. Rather, the problem is that users entrenched in a White supremacist culture are reluctant to concede ground that they never owned. Instead of adapting to the “social demographics” of a space that has admitted users of color, many White users retreat into their socially useful fantasies. By paying attention to the ways in which Black cultures are “made and re-made” through fan fiction online, I am trying to engage in a reparative practice that complements the work of criticizing tendencies that foreclose efforts to envision a diverse world of SF texts in fan culture.

For the purposes of reading fan fiction in this chapter, I am revisiting and drawing on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Harry Potter fan fiction at the archive that I helped foster, Remember Us. Remember Us has collected fan fiction, artwork, and video that portray characters of color from popular media (television, film, comics and graphic novels, and print fiction) in primary and pivotal roles. When I began working on the site, it was a relatively novel resource for fans on the Internet; there was no central archive for fan fiction featuring characters of color. In the time I have devoted to exploring the past for other areas of this book, Remember Us has become a minor node in a growing network of online venues that connect fans, authors, and artists across experiences of racial identification with speculative fiction and other genres across media. I can only gesture toward these indispensable resources within the scope of my writing, but because

their exemplary work demands presence, I will invoke some of them here: communities on Tumblr, LiveJournal, and DreamWidth; writers and readers on fanfiction.net; artists and commenters on DeviantArt; Afrogeek; the Carl Brandon Society; Black Girl Nerds; The Afrofuturist Affair; WisCon and VividCon attendees; and originators of and respondents to Twitter hashtags such as #blerdchat and #WeNeedDiverseBooks, among countless others, extend the work of Blackness and fandom online. They sustain the praxis that this book recommends.

I undertook a substantial overhaul of the site in preparation for writing this chapter, restyling the HTML-based design with CSS, showcasing fan-made music videos featuring characters of color as well as fiction and art, attempting to recover broken links to fan fiction elsewhere online, and beginning to reconnect with users in social networks to acquire content on an ongoing basis. This work appears throughout this chapter in ways that I hope readers and potential users at the archive can appreciate. My work on Remember Us extended the impulse behind the initial formation of the archive, which I would call reparative. By invoking this term, I am referring to the critical practice identified with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the introduction. The fan fiction cited in this chapter finds inspiring possibilities seated in otherwise heteronormative, racially marginalizing texts. Even though the oppression of Black British–diasporic women informs the themes of the fan fiction I address in this chapter, I appraise the negative valences of fan writers’ critical response to popular narratives as only one tendency within an otherwise generative effort to flesh out the underdeveloped meanings of Blackness in popular fantasy texts. Remember Us emerged as a response to marginalizing discourse in fandom and cyberculture, and I would argue for its continued utility in reparative rather than paranoid terms.

A similar desire to foment dialogue in a relatively new cultural environment where cyberspace meets fan culture, where dialogue on race has been lacking, animates my work as an archivist and critic. I could only do justice to the ongoing theoretical and historical relevance of the archive by acknowledging the need to return to and recover its past using the technological tools my position as a scholar makes available. My dream for Remember Us is not that it will grow in significance to become central to discourse on fandom but that it will attenuate to become a reference point for fans and scholars who might share some of my coordinates on the media landscape and bring some others. This essay thus rehearses the

work I would like to see the archive perform for media fandom and African American studies at the intersection of contemporary perspectives on two important, linked cultural processes: diaspora and memory.

Fandom @ Diaspora

This chapter is in dialogue with current scholarship on fandom that continues to elide meanings for “media fandom” that would extend its context beyond White middle-class women from Anglo–North American locales. In *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online*, Rhiannon Bury brings scholarship on fandom up to date by exploring online communities concerned with *The X-Files* and *Due South* television series. Like other ethnographic studies on media fandom, her sample includes a set of women who identify themselves as college-educated and White. She conceptualizes the virtual and experiential spaces of female fandoms as heterotopias where new forms of affiliation become possible, but the political possibilities of these spaces are constrained by a very particular history characteristic of White Anglo–North American women.¹¹ “To properly contextualize the formation of women-only spaces,” Bury explains, “it is critical to provide a genealogy of the ways Western women have been officially relegated to the realm of the private as well as the ways in which they have been able to create spaces that disturb the public/private binary.”¹² This genealogy is rooted in White middle-class women’s initial exclusion from and subsequent containment within clerical roles in the wage labor economy of the First World, as well as their concomitant refashioning of domestic space around ideals of privacy and pleasure, and it represents fandom as a space that Penley and Ross would call “protopolitical,”¹³ a self-fashioned territory where the overdetermined meanings of technology and capital are suspended, allowing everyday feminisms to emerge. These experiences of work and space have not prevailed for women of African descent, however.

“Absent from work on fandom, including my own, is an examination of race and ethnic identity,”¹⁴ Bury admits. Nonetheless, her chapter on heterotopia engages in a thoughtful examination of the discourse of Canadian national identity at work in *Due South*. She recounts an astute fan reading of the treatment of White Canadians’ appropriation of Native lands and cultures to convey how fans imagine their national identities: “Ironically, it is the ‘mythic presence but real absence’ of aboriginal peoples which provides legitimacy to White colonization and ownership of the

land.”¹⁵ I would reverse rather than refute this keen observation. It is the mythic absence, and the violently repressed but very real presence of racially marginalized peoples, that reinforces White supremacist fantasies about U.S. and Canadian national identity. Bury’s study is attentive to the gaps in her archive, as her concluding note indicates. However, her insights about the ways in which race subtends the fantasy of Canadian identity in *Due South* fandom are central to her discussion of heterotopia; it is here, at the meeting of competing discourses of reterritorialization and deterritorialization, that fandom becomes a contestatory space where national and domestic frames of reference are insufficient. A supplementary archive, an archive of interpretive practices that not only question the public–private binary but drive home a more pointed set of questions about how to make domestic dramas public, serves the purposes of a critical dialogue on race that exceeds the limits of scholarship on media fandom.

Gayatri Gopinath draws on the work of Janet Staiger to position viewers who look away from the normative meanings of cultural production as “perverse spectators,” and she situates their queer critical practices in a diasporic rather than solely national frame of reference.¹⁶ Discussing the ways that mainstream cinema from India circulates throughout the South Asian diaspora in *Impossible Desires*, she argues that “this cinema may in fact provide diasporic audiences with the means by which to reterritorialize the ‘homeland’ by making it the locus of queer desire and pleasure, rather than a site of remembered homogeneity and ‘unity.’”¹⁷ An anecdote from Bury’s research on *Due South* demonstrates the relevance of such an alternative discourse of spectatorship as a supplement to the ways in which media fandom informs national and racial identities in the popular imagination. Bury recounts a conversation among fans about Canadian identity that invoked the country’s contestant in the Miss Universe beauty pageant. The contestant was “a visible minority of South Asian origin,” Bury notes, and her rendition of the “national costume of Canada” was a bright orange affair dripping with rhinestones and festooned with yellow and green.¹⁸ In her discussion of the way *Due South* fans brought representations of Canada in the series to bear on this image from the beauty pageant, calling her ethnic costume “un-Canadian,” Bury criticizes her informants’ failure to imagine Canadian identity beyond Whiteness.¹⁹ With no recourse to a frame of reference beyond the national, however, Bury cites the recent political narrative through which Canada identifies itself as a “multicultural” society as an alternative national myth,

rather than making the implicit connection between the deterritorialized space from which Miss Canada emerges (“South Asian origin”) and the deterritorialized space of indigenous peoples—referenced earlier in Bury’s study—on which the myth of a White Canada was founded.

Instead of a set of competing national myths, a diasporic genealogy of identities situated in an Anglo–North American context might inform our spectatorship in the era of globalization. In the process of decolonizing Anglo–North American popular culture as a site of diasporic cultural production, we might be able to reimagine and challenge the archives of White supremacist fantasies. Imagining cultural production in ways that deviate from such marginalizing ideologies entails remembering histories of heterogeneity and bringing them into the present. Diaspora is a dynamic historical frame of reference through which we can mobilize such alternative genealogies of subject formation. To imagine media fandom beyond hegemonic, domesticated female subjectivity and toward counterhegemonic models of race, class, and gender, we need to construct an archive that deviates from those norms.

Acts of Remembrance

While most of the principal characters in many television series, films, comics, and novels favored by contributors to Remember Us are White, the guidelines I have maintained for the archive outline expansive possibilities for representing racial diversity in popular media:

Does your story feature a character of color in a lead role? Then we want it!
Does your story feature a character of color as an equal part of an ensemble?
Then we want it! A two line appearance, by the way, does not count as an equal part of an ensemble.

And now the sticky portion: for the purposes of this archive, a CoC is defined as any non-caucasian character—we are not accepting ethnic caucasians not because they’re not “of-color,” but because 1) ethnic caucasians are heavily represented in popular media, and 2) it would put us in the uncomfortable position of creating a “brown enough” scale, and we just don’t want to go there.²⁰

As I redesigned the pages that would house stories in each fandom, from the television series *Alias* to the X-Men films, I selected examples for this research project by focusing on fandoms that present alternative visions of Anglo–North American spaces. Works of fan fiction that foreground the

perspectives of people of color who usually play supporting roles shift the terrain of popular media narratives. Instead of utilizing new media technologies to propagate fantasies of national identity that marginalize people of color, *Remember Us* reterritorializes virtual space and the imagined space of the social through the presence of people of color in pivotal roles. The texts that I selected, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Harry Potter series, imagine Britain as the site of both mundane and fantastic possibilities in canon and in fandom, and they hew to the generic conventions of fantasy within the larger tradition of speculative fiction. I view the space of fantasy as a compelling site of genre formation that is often eclipsed by science fiction in the speculative genres, and the wholesale suspension of scientific plausibility in fantasy offers a pleasurable resonance with the information age periodization of this chapter.

Despite their generic divergences, the function of Britain in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series is similar in some respects to that of Canada in *Due South*: an alternative national context authenticates U.S. aspirations toward sophistication and propriety, away from troublesome racial and cultural histories. The vampire slayer fantasy is an ersatz horror narrative turned humorous countermyth in which the blonde, doe-eyed heroine gains the power to vanquish supernatural evildoers instead of playing the helpless victim. The British counterpart to the title character is her mentor, the Watcher Rupert Giles, a librarian easily identified by heavy tomes, a stately accent, and small glasses. A romanticized portrait of the history of the vampire slayer tradition positions Britain as the headquarters of a “Watchers Council,” where tea-sipping learned men and women like Giles monitor and authenticate the protocol of the vampire slayer’s quest. In the second and fourth seasons of *Buffy*, however, Black British–diasporic characters named Kendra and Olivia, respectively, appear to complicate the romantic and homogeneous portrait of Britain, including its relationship to the Southern California milieu that provides the setting of the series and its reconstructed feminine ideal. Fan fictions featuring these characters ally them with an alternative paradigm for the relationship between racialized national and transnational cultures and the vampire slayer fantasy.

The Harry Potter novels and films, conversely, emerge from Britain into a transnational media marketplace. The tale of an orphan who was weaned in the mundane world and then spirited away to a school for young wizards turned author J. K. Rowling into Britain’s wealthiest woman and led to a series of blockbuster films that enjoy a crossover audience. Fans wedded

to the national specificity of the novels contend with the shifts in meaning these British texts undergo at the whims of audiences abroad. The hazards of translation are only increasing as popular narratives and creative texts by fans see virtually simultaneous circulation across media and national borders. A thoughtful response to the transformations of Harry Potter posted at the Fanfic Symposium, an online forum for critical essays by fans, focuses on language that Americanizes British fandom:

I'm becoming more and more irked by the fact that there are far too many writers who are not bothering to learn about the culture that Harry and his friends and foes live in, despite having the books as reference material. . . . Did you know that gotten is very old English that presumably went over to America with the Pilgrim Fathers, but fell out of use in Britain and is now only commonly used in the phrase *ill gotten gains*? Knowing that, aren't you far less likely to have your characters, particularly the adults, use gotten instead of got?²¹

The writer's etymological turn on the word *gotten* is a compelling point of departure for the overlapping histories of British and U.S. English. This linguistic divergence has consequences for the relationship between racial and national identities in the Harry Potter texts. While Rowling only refers to African-descended characters in the Harry Potter series with the word "Black," the extended meaning of the term in recent British history makes the presence of characters of color in her work relevant to a diasporic, as well as a national, frame of reference.

Paul Gilroy articulates the need to question why "the limits of 'race' have come to coincide so precisely with national frontiers. . . . The effect of this ideological operation is visible in the way that the word 'immigrant' became synonymous with the word 'Black' during the 1970s."²² The British racial history that informs Harry Potter is always already transnational, inscribed in exchanges of meaning between English and other Anglo-North American contexts. Language seems to unite Britain and North America, but in fact, it separates them and creates mediating structures to suture them back together. Black British-diasporic characters represent diaspora as a heterogeneous space where English and Anglo-North American meanings coincide rather than diverge; this structure of affiliation demonstrates how, within fandom and diaspora, "active consent to normative practices is suspended."²³ Reimagining Harry Potter's Britain through the lens of diaspora, fan fiction at the Remember Us archive "reconstitutes national borders by reversing the normative media

flow” that would constrain the meaning of Blackness to a national context.²⁴ In the latter half of the following pages, I discuss portrayals of two Black characters in Harry Potter, Angelina Johnson and Dean Thomas, in stories that contribute to the genre traditions of fantasy and fan fiction.

While the desire to cast characters like the ones I discuss presently as protagonists inspires the writing archived at Remember Us, these characters’ marginality is the condition of possibility for some of the most illustratively perverse interventions that writers make through fan fiction. Principal characters are an open book. The origin stories, life narratives, and sexual histories of the eponymous heroes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Harry Potter series frequently take center stage in their canonical texts. Yet amateur fan critics and professional scholars alike recognize that characters with queer and critical points of view tend to occupy supporting roles. “It’s simply more interesting for the reader/viewer to ponder the background and character of the more minor roles. Due to their status as minor roles, the lesser characters are generally underdeveloped,” writes Dylan Gleason at the Fanfic Symposium. “There’s a far greater range of possibilities for the backgrounds of roles who haven’t been fully fleshed out, as proof to the contrary of whatever the readers/viewers have imagined is scant to nonexistent.”²⁵ Whereas the narratives of main characters tend to reinforce hegemonic norms of race, gender, and sexuality, in part to propel their stars into heteronormative roles as “sex symbols,” minor characters may not have to work as hard to reassure fans about their questionable performances of identity and desire because they garner less attention from the general public.

In addition, the deviance of minor characters may even buttress the normative meanings of main characters’ actions. “The vast majority of ‘queer-coded’ characters in Hollywood film are in fact in supporting roles. . . . Effeminate men and masculine women are conjured at up the margins of the model gender behavior of the stars,” Patricia White notes.²⁶ Gayatri Gopinath elaborates on a quotation from White to point out that the marginalization of queer characters that buttresses heterosexuality in Hollywood cinema translates into a particular equation of gender and nationalism when Bollywood is translated for diasporic audiences. In works such as Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, portrayals of female characters acquiesce to a sexual politics that allows for homoeroticism and effeminacy among men but renders female sexualities invisible and implicitly “impossible.” Whereas the marginal roles afforded to characters of color, particularly women of color, limit their possibilities in canon,

the emphasis on minor characters in fan fiction demonstrates how marginalization can yield creativity. Gopinath points out that remakes of Bollywood cinema often reinstall heteronormative roles for major and minor characters alike to conform to the U.S.-dominated film market.²⁷ By the same token, however, audiences can reterritorialize Bollywood film through diasporic viewing practices, observing how complexity and diversity have always resided “at home,” instead of assuming that a departure from the nation is the condition of possibility for deviance.

In the case of contemporary fan fiction, similarly, the alternative circuit of cultural production that cyberspace represents with respect to television and film allows audiences to reinstall the potential meanings that reside at the margins of a popular text’s representations of racial and sexual difference. Cyberspace, as one of the transnational, overlapping publics that characterize contemporary popular culture, exists in dialogue with diaspora. Thus it is important, as Gopinath points out, to recognize how the contexts of cultural production among disparate audiences make disparate interpretations possible. Rather than ascribing heteronormative meanings to Black British–diasporic women’s sexualities, as if minor characters and marginal subjects exist only to point to “authentic” national, racial, and sexual identities, fan fiction online and performances that circulate in diaspora share the common aim of illuminating the rich meanings of life at the margins. The transnational scope of cultural production has the capacity to speak to audiences’ desires in ways that enable us to reimagine national frames of reference and the “natural” identities ascribed to them.

In addition, the narratives fans construct around minor characters respond to the discourses of trauma that inform nonheteronormative and diasporic identities. Rather than repressing minor characters’ deviance to recast them in central roles, the works of fan fiction I have read at *Remember Us* demonstrate how marginalized subjects can travel—moving across media, from the screens of television and cinema to computer screens and, through media, to many spaces across the globe—with their complexity intact. Through fan fiction, forgotten characters reappear, not quite undoing but remembering their marginal status, and complicating national identities in the process. Instead of responding to traumatic exclusions and marginalization by forgetting the past, fan fiction creates new memories and new futures. Each of the following readings of popular fantasy narratives foregrounds representations of Black British–diasporic women to examine how fan fiction retrieves queer diasporic desires from the realm of the impossible.

Kendra, the Vampire Slayer

Bianca Lawson appears as Kendra the vampire slayer in four episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. As is often the case in the fantastic genres, however, her significance to fandom exceeds her canonical role. She lives on through fan fiction even though her character dies on-screen. Two works of fan fiction expand Kendra's role beyond that of a low point in the already tragic vampire slayer fantasy at the heart of the series by shedding light on her origins. The tragedy of *Buffy* is the title character's inability to enjoy life as an attractive, anti-intellectual teenager in Southern California. Slaying vampires and seeing close comrades die in battle alienates Buffy from her desired social life. In Kendra's short screen time, she faced the challenges of the fantastic role from a different point of view: she was a Black Caribbean emigrant rather than a White Californian suburbanite, she took up her calling as a vampire slayer at an earlier age and with stricter discipline than Buffy, and despite the physical demands of her superhero role, she displayed a deferential hyperfemininity in the presence of young men. In many ways, Kendra's story casts the process of becoming a vampire slayer as not just tragic but traumatic. Alienated from her family and ancestral home, in addition to her life as a normal teenager, she fulfills the fantastic role in the shadow of the more normative character who defines it in the series. Her death is not the end of the meanings her character lends to the vampire slayer fantasy but the beginning of a deeper exploration of their implications. In this light, the White American vampire slayer who stars in the series appears insulated from the trauma that otherwise characterizes the myth.

While tropes of heterosexual femininity combined with fantasy-horror heroism make Buffy's escapades ironic, these same qualities applied to Kendra cast the latter character as doubly displaced. She was, like Buffy, cut off from her childhood when she was chosen as a vampire slayer, but in the course of her short-lived mission in the series, she was further removed into a setting that was hospitable to Buffy but foreign and alienating for Kendra. As a diasporic character, Kendra stood out upon her arrival among the predominantly White cast of the TV series: first through her race, and second through her voice. Her appearance as a Black woman with an ethnically marked hairstyle stood out; no other members of *Buffy's* ensemble were Black until many seasons later. Once she spoke on-screen, however, she performed an uncanny gesture to identify herself: "I am Kendra—the vampire slayer," she said, with an exaggerated yet imprecise Caribbean English accent. The tragedy of *Buffy's* slayer myth was that one

girl in every generation would be chosen to fight the vampires; until she dies and gets replaced, each generation's slayer fights alone. Kendra's arrival alongside Buffy fundamentally challenged the myth, undermining the slayer's uniqueness but offering her companionship at the same time. That Buffy's counterpart was Black and a non-U.S. citizen, but still Anglo-North American, according to her implied cultural lineage, challenged *Buffy's* heretofore singular version of the myth. Buffy's dilemma was fundamentally modern: she struggled with and resisted her traditional obligations in favor of idiosyncratic pleasures and familiar dangers.²⁸ Kendra's arrival was a return of the repressed, moving to the United States from a diasporic, formerly colonial location that recalled the British, Old World foundation on which the slayer fantasy was built.

Fans interpreted Kendra's off-screen history as a blank slate onto which they might project both a supplementary rendition of her underdeveloped individual origin narrative and an alternative interpretation of tropes within the vampire slayer fantasy. I focus on the former in a story titled "The Chosen One" and the latter in a story called "Little Blue Bottles." In "The Chosen One," Kendra first appears as a carefree young child at her island home. "The sound of the sea could be heard through the open door of the small house," it begins, "lilting music rippling out from the radio, the local DJ extolling the virtues of having an outdoor studio to broadcast from."²⁹ From its first sentence, this story of Kendra's origins places environmental features as her distinguishing characteristics. The author describes the island location through sound rather than vision, noting the sea and the "music rippling," like water, into Kendra's modest home. The open door of the house and the outdoor studio of the radio station place Kendra's compatriots in close proximity to nature at all times, but here nature is benign and accommodating rather than primal or savage. Nature is joined to culture through the medium of the radio, and the DJ reassures his audience about their favorable arrangement with the elements. The first visual cues regarding Kendra's presence in the story are racialized, as was her first appearance in canon, but this reference to race appears in a different frame:

"Momma." A dark face peeked around the door at the woman in the kitchen, a wide grin on her face, "I is goin' to da beach. Danny K says de's found a pirate treasure. We's gonna dig it up and sell it!" Clad in a rainbow t-shirt and tiny, denim shorts the little girl fitted in with every other child on the island.

Young Kendra emerges into a setting that identifies her with commonality rather than difference. Through the door, her “dark face” calls for a dark mother, and in her little outfit, she looks the part of a young islander. Redundancy seems to haunt the work of fan fiction to a degree that may displease professional editors. Kendra’s “face” appears twice in the same sentence, as if to remind the reader that she is grinning ear to ear, and her attire has a stereotypical quality. The rainbow colors of her T-shirt evoke tie-dye, associating the character’s appearance more closely with the signs of reggae music fandom in its heyday as a popular genre import rather than a study of Jamaican parents’ sartorial choices for their children. Yet here I would argue that the repetition of distinguishing features is an important cue to intertextuality. In *Buffy*, Kendra’s dark and usually unsmiling face stands out in the crowd of White, aloof teenagers who take up the battle against evil as a comedy. At the archive, however, readers are able to witness Kendra smiling, enjoying her family, and indulging in her *own* fantasies, of “pirate treasure,” as part of a past that was long gone when she became the heroine’s dutiful Black counterpart.

The author, Fyre, uses a depiction of Kendra’s calling as a vampire slayer in “The Chosen One” to bring poignancy to a scene she shares with Buffy in the series. Kendra’s becoming the slayer is more decisively a migration narrative, the fan fiction suggests, than Buffy’s. While Buffy left Los Angeles with her divorced mother to seek a normal life in a quieter California town, transferring high schools and hoping to avoid slaying vampires (so she thought), Kendra’s Watcher arrives to take her from her family at a very young age for training. “Mistah Zabuto,” as he’s called in the text, explains to Kendra’s family that their daughter’s unique qualities might make them targets and that training her to fight supernatural evil is the only way to protect Kendra and her people. Though her family acquiesces, she rebels: “I don’t wanna go! I don’t wanna be da Chosen One!” She stared angrily at Mistah Zabuto, who was looking upset. ‘I ain’t goin’ nowhere wit you, Mistah Zabuto. Momma wants me to stay, so I is stayin’ right here.’” The comfort and safety of family life is a desirable norm for Kendra, who would rather grow up as a typical youth than become the only young woman of her kind in the entire world. Moreover, her initial demand that she doesn’t want to “go” reminds the reader that joining the battle the vampire slayer fantasy represents entails fighting the supernatural on its own territory—the California setting of *Buffy*. For Kendra, that setting is foreign; it lies beyond the sea. Kendra also has a big brother in the story, unmentioned in canon, and their rapport underscores the

traumatic quality of leaving home. They say a tearful farewell before she departs with Zabuto, and Kendra thinks, on her first voyage away from home, “if she became a Slayer, she would do it all for him.”

In light of the developments in “The Chosen One,” Kendra’s relationship to Buffy on-screen appears more complex and differential than reassuring and sisterly. Buffy’s British Watcher phones Kendra’s Watcher, Zabuto, to confirm the new slayer’s bona fides. A relationship of authority that connects men, British (Rupert Giles) and Black British–diasporic (the ethnically named Zabuto), to watch over young women, has replaced Kendra’s family structure, while Buffy lives at home with her mother. In addition, as she’s become estranged from her brother, Kendra lacks the primary relationship with a young man that she found desirable on her own terms. By contrast, when Buffy’s friend Xander introduces himself to Kendra in the series, Kendra retreats into herself and discloses that she has never been allowed to speak to young men. Neither heterosexual romance nor kinship with men is available to Kendra, and the homosocial bond she shares with Buffy is frayed from its beginning by their markedly different circumstances. Though these tensions are visible on-screen, a further exploration of Kendra’s background in “The Chosen One” fleshes out their significance to the character’s motivation and her affect.

Fyre replays a scene from the series in which Buffy and Kendra discuss their lives as vampire slayers, and by combining details from earlier in the story with the characters’ on-screen dialogue, Fyre fills in the gaps from Kendra’s perspective on subjects about which the series has already shown how Buffy feels:

“Your life is . . . very different dan mine.” She finally volunteered, glancing down at her fellow Slayer, hoping she would be able to hold some kind of conversation.

Buffy gave her another weary smile. “You mean the part where I occasionally have one?” she nodded. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

This was good. They were talking, making conversation, being civil. Two girls, with the same curse and the same destiny. “De tings you do and have, I was taught, distract from my calling.” She started to explain. “Friends, school . . .” she paused, letting her finger run over the leather band that was still bound tightly around her wrist.

At an earlier point in the story, Fyre writes that Kendra’s childhood best friend, Danny K, gave her a woven leather friendship bracelet when she left home. The item refers to a bracelet that Kendra wears on-screen in

the series, but it only gains a provenance through the background a fan writer has imagined for Kendra. The reference to Kendra's on-screen gesture enables viewers to revisit seemingly trivial details about the character they remember with attention to aspects of her personality and performance besides those of the vampire slayer saga. Kendra goes on, in a similar vein, to discuss her separation from her family:

"My parents, dey sent me to my Watcher when I was very young." Well, in a manner of speaking, she thought sadly. Gave me up is more the truth, let me be taken by my Destiny and now, they'll never know.

"How young?"

She shrugged. "I don't remember dem, actually." Not clearly anyway . . . only words, images, feelings. "I've seen pictures. But, uh, dat's how seriously de calling is taken by my people." They give up their infants to save the world. "My modder and fadder gave me to my Watcher because dey believed dat dey were doing de right ting for me, and for de world." The Jamaican Slayer laid down the stake she had been toying with, remembering her elder brother's words of wisdom with a small smile, then saw Buffy's eyes clouding with sympathy. "Please, I don't feel sorry for meself. Why should you?"

If Kendra's relationship to Buffy was vexed in life, fanfic confounds the meaning of her role in the series after her untimely death. In her third and final episode in the series, Kendra falls prey to a seductive female vampire who slits her throat, anticlimactically, and leaves Buffy to find her fallen comrade's body. Kendra's loss appears to buttress the narrative of Buffy's tragic inability to enjoy a normal life, but "The Chosen One" challenged her marginal status by expanding her role internally instead of focusing on her significance to the title character. "Little Blue Bottles" makes both gestures, commenting on the way Buffy may have felt about Kendra and extending a discussion of Kendra's background at the same time. Whereas Kendra's history as related in "The Chosen One" seems to wedge the Black and White vampire slayers apart before they ever meet, "Little Blue Bottles" speaks to a desire to bring them together after canonical events separate them. Kate Bolin's short story excels at representing the unspeakable, speaking to Buffy's and Kendra's "impossible desires" through an idiomatic citation of Kendra's fictitious diasporic background. Kendra's death has the traumatic effect of leaving the series devoid of representations of Blackness; by offering an alternative link between the British and American (hemispheric) locations of the slayer myth only briefly, the series reneges on the promises it holds. Rather than thwarting the desires of

fans invested in Kendra's diasporic identity, however, fan fiction demonstrates how Kendra's death provides an occasion to pursue them further.

Kendra recounts her life and death from beyond the grave in the first person in Bolin's story. She recalls, "When I first came to Mr. Zabuto's house, I was a baby. And the bright blue bottles on sticks all around the house were something I had never paid attention to. Glistening in the rain, casting a blue glow over the ground in the sun, their little strips of cloth floating in the breeze, they were always there, and I never noticed them."³⁰ The memory from Kendra's childhood, from the moment she was called as a vampire slayer, positions the blue bottles as objects whose significance she would only come to understand after meeting her destiny. By associating the blue bottles with Kendra's Watcher, at his house rather than her own childhood home, the story situates them among the calling cards of the vampire slayer fantasy. Kendra recalls her own death by addressing the first person who saw her body (Buffy), but she implicitly calls on the reader, as well ("I saw you"). In Buffy's shoes, the reader relates to Kendra through the feelings they share in this account: "I saw you try to save me, ignoring your friends, ignoring the vampires. You held me in your arms, and wished that I was still alive." The basis for these words is a scene from the television series in which Buffy cradles Kendra's lifeless body. When the scene is recapitulated from Kendra's point of view, however, the impossible situation of hearing her remember her own death is joined to an impossible meaning for the two slayers' posthumous embrace. When Kendra felt "held . . . in your arms," she was already dead, but she was also sharing an exclusive ("ignoring your friends, ignoring the vampires") intimacy with Buffy that exceeded their homosocial kinship. Wishing she were still alive, Buffy appreciates Kendra and recognizes that their mutual fulfillment of one another's desires has become impossible.

Bolin follows Buffy's impossible feelings for Kendra with an imaginary account of Kendra's desire to return from the dead. First, the slain slayer seeks home. She finds "the small blue bottles kept me away. The tiny strips of cloth warnings against me—against my kind. No duppies allowed near this house—no dead watchers, no dead servants, no dead slayers." The blue bottles recur, their meaning now clear, as a ward against the supernatural threat that Kendra's return from the dead would pose. When Kendra recognizes her kind as "duppies," Bolin invokes an Anglo-Caribbean colloquialism for the undead or ghosts—what Kendra has become. By phrasing Kendra's moment of recognition in these terms, the writer appreciates the loss of the cultural specificity the character brought to the series

by allowing her to remain a diasporic subject after her death. While this act of remembrance sutures Kendra's life and death to the vampire slayer fantasy by recognizing that she can't go home again, it also makes it possible for her to travel elsewhere. Bolin's dead slayer narrates a syllogism that continues her diasporic and queer trajectory:

I can not go home again. I am bound to search for a new home.

You held me. You wished that I was still alive.

You caused this. You died, and came back.

I want to come back.

I want to come back to you.

Let me come. Let me stay. Do not place a blue bottle in your yard.

By writing of Kendra's desire to return as part of her affinity with Buffy against the limitations on their roles within the vampire slayer fantasy, "Little Blue Bottles" offers an alternative take on what Kendra's life and death mean to the fantastic dimensions of the narrative. Kendra was uprooted from her home by a fantastic destiny in the series, and the fan-authored story shows her barred from returning home by a supernatural device. By reimagining her role in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as one stage in a diasporic movement that began before her appearance and continues after her death, "Little Blue Bottles" commemorates Kendra's legacy. Remembering Kendra conjures the queer image of two femininities, one Black, one White, in an impossible embrace, contributing to a set of Anglo-North American fantasies that are "modern" and diasporic.

Olivia @ Home in Diaspora

When Buffy the vampire slayer starts college, a year after Kendra's tragic death, her mentor Giles lets her out from under his wing and resumes a personal life of his own. Buffy discovers her staid British father figure's personal life in a most direct way when she walks into his home and is greeted by a woman wearing one of his shirts—and little else. The character portrayed by Phina Oruche is named Olivia. Her beauty and sexually suggestive appearance underscore the British male librarian's heterosexuality, but her visible Blackness—dark skinned, natural haired—calls their shared national identity into question. One of the signifiers for cultural difference between Britons and Americans in *Buffy* is the reserved demeanor of the former. Whereas Kendra shrank like a violet at the slightest indication of a young man's attention but took her "calling"

as a vampire slayer seriously, Olivia enters the series with an entitlement to intimacy with a male character that antedates Buffy's adventures, and she reacts with surprise and displeasure to learn about the supernatural milieu through which Giles has formed a bond with his young charge. Olivia was positioned to offer an outsider's perspective during her brief appearance in the series, and she articulated an alternative set of interests from her unique vantage point. Interpreting her significance in fan fiction, viewers weave another image of Black British-diasporic subjectivity into the tapestry of *Buffy's* fantasy that modifies its real and imagined national contexts.

When she is confronted with evidence of monsters and magic in California, Olivia beats a hasty retreat from Rupert Giles's unsettling life. For her, unlike the show's viewers, Britain and Giles are not the source of ancient protocols for dealing with the supernatural but the place and person that embody ordinary life. Only by rereading the narrative from Olivia's point of view can fans apprehend Britain as a contradictory space of representation, signifying both mundane and fantastic possibilities. In fictions that imagine Olivia's return home, fans extend the narrative's boundaries to encompass her British-diasporic Blackness, her heterosexuality, and the significance of the vampire slayer phenomenon from her point of view. These considerations trouble any easy determination of what it means for her to engage and disengage with supernatural forces, providing an allegory for the relationship between Black culture and the fantasy genre as interpretive frames of reference.

The story called "Home Fires" reflects on Olivia's tenure as a character in *Buffy* from a first-person perspective as a rendition of her personal diary. Calling attention to this form, the author imputes a whimsical sensibility to Olivia that positions her as a Black Briton with a proprietary interest in her national identity. "Dear Diary . . . Before I get started, I'd like to point out that I kept journals long before Bridget Jones Mania turned Helen Fielding into even more of a millionaire and an American actress into the soul of modern female Britannia."³¹ Olivia's representative Britishness positions U.S. film actress Renée Zellweger, star of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as an outsider. Through the presentation of a White American pretending to the popular culture throne, Olivia's Blackness becomes distinctly British. The author also lays claim to the integrity of Olivia's diary through the reference, authenticating her national perspective and her personal perspective at the same time. Olivia's recollections begin with a list of "Things I Know Now That I Didn't Before," which neatly

summarizes her adventures with Rupert Giles and Buffy Summers in California:

One: In-flight films are rarely anything better than torturous, especially when they're about baseball.

Two: The supernatural exists. (Naturally.)

Three: Vampires, vampire slayers, witches, ex-demons and bald grinning things that steal voices and cut out people's hearts are only a few of the colorful denizens of nighttime California.

Four: There is a reason why Rupert's always such a homebody after dark. There is also a reason why he entertains young, nubile blonde girls who interrupt while I'm visiting. (See #3.)

The author makes Olivia's response to the supernatural consistent with her personality by affecting a tone of ironic understatement regarding both supernatural and American oddities. For Olivia to accept the existence of monsters, she must suspend her disbelief. In response to the same events, she revisits her expectations about Giles and her initial impression of his relationship to Buffy. The preceding list foregrounds Olivia's shared identification with Giles, invoking their shared "home" space as the context for their relationship by characterizing him as a "homebody," while positioning the "colorful denizens of nighttime California" as foreign threats to be avoided by retreating to the safety of home. In addition, by situating Buffy among the supernatural ("Three: Vampires, vampire slayers . . ."), she dampens a potential anxiety about Giles's relationship to "young, nubile blonde girls who interrupt" by placing both situations at the limits of possibility.

Thus the author sets the stage for further events in the story by outlining the qualities of home from Olivia's perspective: safety, shared identification, and the contrasts of, first, the American against the British and, second, the supernatural against the mundane. Giles's return to Britain, and to Olivia, is the occasion for the "Home Fires" in question. Olivia writes, "Because now that Rupert is back in England permanently, I feel sure that I'll be seeing quite a lot more of him than when he was an ocean and a continent, and therefore an extremely long plane ride, away (See #1)." When she describes the denizens of California as "colorful," Olivia alludes to the multiple supernatural features of Buffy's ensemble cast, but she also invokes an ironic racial differential between her Britain and Buffy's California. Though Giles's adoptive family includes "a vampire slayer, a witch, and a thousand-year-old ex-demon," they are all White, yet Olivia's

national and rational distance naturalizes her Blackness. Olivia's grounding in the mundane turns the tables on the West Coast cosmopolitanism that had made Giles such an Old World outlier in the setting of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Olivia's dilemma, however, is finding a proper context for Giles. She views him as a man tending two fires: her home and hearth in Britain, which she repeatedly characterizes as "ordinary" ("Rupert Giles does not do well with the ordinary") and "normal" ("All told, it was a very *normal* visit, really"), on one hand, and his chosen family in California, on the other. Rupert's other world, she realizes, is too otherworldly for her tastes. In the context of their shared identification as it is outlined in this story, Olivia's second thoughts about Giles challenge the meaning of Britain in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. If Britain is positioned outside the U.S.-based narrative, as Giles's place of origin and the headquarters of the Watchers' Council, it is the source of the vampire slayer fantasy that disrupts Buffy's desire for a normal American life. But the Britain that is home, from Olivia's point of view, is marked by denial in the face of extraordinary possibilities. The story seems to forge a continental divide in Anglo-North American space as a rationale for Olivia's choice to return home and eventually reclaim her relationship in heteronormative terms.

What would it mean to conceptualize Olivia's desire for heterosexual domestic bliss with Giles as a choice? Instead of naturalizing her heterosexuality and queering her departure from home, it might be constructive to reread her concept of home as an act that chooses one set of contradictions over another. Olivia's domesticity may cast her as an outsider, but what if she likes it that way? Olivia's return to Britain may occur as a retreat from traumatic revelations, but it is also the consequence of a choice to opt out of the space that embodies undesirable aspects of the vampire slayer fantasy, from her point of view. Instead of remaining in the American space wrought with contradictions that can be described in the language of science fiction and fantasy, she returns to Britain with the knowledge that it, too, is contradictory, but mundane. Rupert Giles, as the erstwhile singular embodiment of Britain in Buffy's eyes, becomes a controversial figure through Olivia's critical perspective. She and Buffy are not fighting over him: they are conflicted over what he represents. While the story seems to reinstall a conflation between heterosexual femininity and the home as a rival to Buffy's ostensibly emancipatory narrative about a young woman, Olivia lays claim in "Home Fires" to new meanings for the space of the domestic, the national, and the heterosexual. In her multiple asides comparing examples of British and U.S.

popular cultures and everyday life from her recent experience, the author's treatment of Olivia imbues her with a coherent perspective on Britain, North America, and the supernatural that is also entitled to the prerogatives of national identity and sexuality as matters of choice.³² Contesting the meaning of desiring Britain is one of the more productive juxtapositions that Olivia's presence in *Buffy* fandom makes possible.

As was the case with Kendra, fan fiction provides for more concrete connections between the fantastic milieu of genre television in which *Buffy* takes place and the diasporic backgrounds that marginal characters like Olivia represent. Olivia also stars in a work of fan fiction that reconfigures the sexualities of *Buffy*'s U.S. cast in relation to their British and diasporic counterparts. Another story of Olivia's confrontation with the cultural codes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Home," invokes a British subject as the third member of a triangle that weds her and Giles to fantasies that deviate from the television series's norms.³³ In early episodes of the show, a shady character named Ethan Rayne appears as a figure from Giles's past. In their youth, Giles and Ethan flirted with evil magic and corruption together. Ethan represents a contrast to Giles's repressed adulthood, and it isn't hard for fans to read him as queer. "Home" situates Olivia on the perverse side of Giles's British past, in turn, by associating her with the deviant warlock. Like "Little Blue Bottles," this very short story also brings a set of extraordinary tropes from a diasporic idiom into conversation to forge new relationships between marginal and principal characters.

The touchstone for both Olivia's diasporic background and her inclusion among the supernatural elements of *Buffy*'s fantasy narrative in "Home" is the orisha Oya: an intermediary between the human and divine that originates in the Yoruba tradition, one of many West African spiritual practices well represented among people of African descent in Anglo-North American diasporic sites. Oya is associated with the surface of bodies of water, such as rivers. In a ritual that takes place in this story, Ethan Rayne and Rupert Giles chant Olivia's name and the name of Oya together: "Olivia. Oya. Olivia. Olivia. Oya," repeatedly, invoking a fantastic tradition that identifies Olivia as both diasporic and preterhuman. In the course of the ritual, a homoerotic connection between Giles and Ethan develops alongside Olivia's connection to the occult. Although this situation hazards marginalizing Olivia further by playing out a relationship between White men on a Black woman's body, the story positions Olivia as its central figure by narrating from her point of view:

She left him two years ago, and then there were no more visits. She went back to London, back to safety, but it didn't matter. She already knew, knew the world she lived in and the things she'd been taught weren't the half of it. She'd seen through a crack in the facade, and now the whole wall was crumbling.

"Oya. Olivia. Oya. Oya. Oya." She can feel it swelling through her chest, her heart aching so hard she feels it might burst.

Olivia's heartache is both exhilaration and lament in this story, as the author recounts her attempt to reinitiate her relationship with Giles amid revelations about the supernatural forces in his life. The "Home" of the title is not the London that offers familiarity and safety, she discovers, but rather the place she has found for herself within Ethan Rayne's world, where she can explore the full range of possibilities that her relationship with Giles had concealed: "She'd been under his wing for almost a year when they heard Rupert had returned. It had taken time to bring him back to them, but under Ethan's tutelage she'd eventually succeeded." Whereas she identified with Giles as long as he appeared mundane, Olivia comes to identify with Ethan as she pursues a British experience that includes the occult. Olivia's Blackness contributes to the milieu in genre-specific terms, in this story, as the invocation of Oya provides an occasion for these characters to engage in deviance instead of retreating into the normative:

"Oya!" She shouts Her name in a thick voice she's never heard before, like movement through stagnant mud. Hears it ring through the forest around them. She draws them close to her, feels Rupert seek out her mouth and kiss her insistently, yearningly, smelling of old books and candle wax. But not like he used to. Something strong and enduring, something primal underneath she's caught on Ethan at times but never this strong. Both of their bare bodies pressed to hers, Ethan sucking a spot on Rupert's throat . . . And Olivia, even though not Olivia, knows Rupert Giles has come home.

The sensual elaboration on canonical meanings that fan fiction offers is one of the signal features of the archive of fantasies Remember Us represents. Works of erotic fiction like "Home" depart from narrative conventions, even those encoded in the canonical texts they reference, in pursuit of pleasure. Work on the margins of these narratives that links them to cultural frames of reference beyond their horizons can offer alternative perspectives on the possibilities available to the fantastic genres. The next

set of stories to which I turn demonstrates how an archive that remembers Black British–diasporic characters in popular fantasy narratives can contribute new perspectives on the conventions of fan fiction itself.

Angelina Johnson, Hurt/Comfort

The last set of readings from the Remember Us archive that I will discuss involves writings on the Harry Potter saga that challenge foundational assumptions about fan fiction. The revisions that these narratives perform to scholarship on media fandom are tethered to the diasporic subject formations and discourses of trauma and memory that this chapter treats in tandem. As Black British–diasporic characters in Harry Potter came into focus for me through fan fiction, I began to understand how these characters might play transformative roles in the categories of analysis through which we understand the relationship between fan fiction and popular media. Rather than understanding fan fiction, however formulaic, as a stable set of genre traditions, I took the irreverence of fan writers into account to read hurt/comfort and slash fiction as transformative categories. In the following pages, I examine what Black British–diasporic characters do for fan fiction as an evolving enterprise and ask what we can do for fan fiction by remembering them.

In light of my readings at Remember Us, I have made a slight diacritical modification to the name used to describe the first genre of fan fiction I examine, a category called *hurt–comfort*, renaming it “hurt/comfort,” with a slash to identify this genre with the queer reading practices that characterize homoerotic slash fiction. The slash relates the members of a romantic relationship in a work of fan fiction, describing notable homoerotic pairings such as “Kirk/Spock” in Star Trek fan fiction or “Dean Thomas/Seamus Finnegan” stories in Harry Potter, for example. The slash, and the use of the word “slash” as shorthand, signals how the roles of characters are defined in relation to one another in the genre. By translating the slash to the title of the hurt/comfort, genre, I am invoking the power of nonheteronormative textual and participatory practices to question gendered and racialized norms; just as a character’s identity is transformed by defying heteronormative conventions, her identity also shifts meaning and affects the identities of others in relationships that occur on differential terms, under conditions such as pain, suffering, and relief. For characters like Angelina Johnson and Kendra the vampire slayer, it is as significant to imagine homoerotic possibilities such as “Buffy/Kendra” as

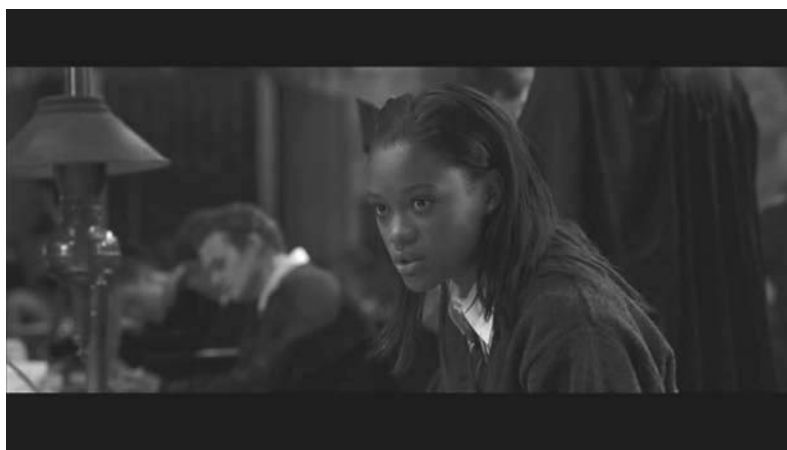
it is to think creatively about trauma and reparation in the heterosexual configuration of “Angelina/Montague” I will discuss presently. Among their other pleasures, hurt/comfort and slash fiction offer opportunities to recast marginalized subjects in principal roles through the distinct intimate relations engendered by shifts in genre. These related fan fiction practices exemplify the nonheteronormative modes of interpretation that circulate in fan culture, and featuring characters of color as the subjects of these discourses demonstrates how attention to race can shift the way we perceive the boundaries between genres.

In one of the first scholarly studies of fan fiction, Camille Bacon-Smith brought her observations about women’s interpretations of popular media to bear on television series such as *Star Trek* and *Starsky and Hutch*. The fans in her study reimagined the genre conventions of television to produce formats such as homoerotic slash fiction, music video, live performance at conventions, and a peculiar variety of fan fiction called “hurt–comfort.” The latter involved situations in which “one of the heroes suffers while the other, or a character created for the purpose, comforts him.”³⁴ Bacon-Smith was careful to maintain the boundaries her informants outlined for “the genre of pain” that set it apart from sadomasochistic erotic fantasies and made distinctions between slash fiction proper and hurt–comfort in particular. Bacon-Smith identifies hurt–comfort as a homosocial phenomenon that challenges the strictures imposed on male gender identification by normative masculinity. She provides a variety of explanations for the significance of the violence that, as a condition of possibility for hurt–comfort fanfic, generates an aversive response from many fans and researchers. The conjunction of violence and the ensuing obligation to comfort its survivors performs the following functions, according to Bacon-Smith’s ethnographic account: it (1) enables fans to “substitute the only symbolic alternative to sexual intimacy available to her,” (2) provides “an outlet for that deep emotional feeling, without having to delve into sex,” (3) “enables a fan writer to explore a ‘more complex and daring’ task in her writing,” and (4) poses a “challenge to her skill as an artist and as a communicator.”³⁵ Attentive as it is to the formal challenges that hurt/comfort represents, it is hard not to see that hurt/comfort fiction also presents an opportunity for writers to confront and reimagine traumatic experiences from perspectives that are sensitive to their needs, such as those of people experiencing pain and those offering them the resources to cope and to recover.

In each of Bacon-Smith’s examples, hurt–comfort involves either a pair of male heroes in which one member is hurt by an antagonist outside

their partnership and the other comforts him, or a couple of protagonists, one male and one female, in which only the male hero suffers at the hands of an outside antagonist and only the female heroine comforts him. None of her examples involves the suffering of a female heroine comforted by a male hero, and in her analysis, Bacon-Smith interprets the figure who suffers as a feminized man, while she identifies the comforting figure with a feminine, “maternal” practice of caring:

In the course of a typical hurt-comfort story, one hero will be injured, or more commonly, he will be captured and injured, while his companion worries about him, empathizes with his pain, and finally offers comfort, signaling the end of the abuse. Throughout, the victim remains powerless, but through the story domination undergoes a transformation: beginning as the product of force—bad, masculine power—it becomes the reflection of his need for caring—good, feminine power. While the victim remains powerless, the move from masculine power to feminine power transforms the victim as well. When the woman begins the story, she may identify the victim as female in spite of the male character that represents her, but as the story progresses, the woman as comforter holds power, even when represented by a man, and the victim or situationally submissive partner has become Man tumbled from his position of power by female compassion and love. In this fictional transformation we see the transmutation of the sadistic urge into the maternal role of self-sacrifice, while the masochistic position of the victim remains ever problematic, both attractive and repellent.³⁶



Tiana Benjamin as Angelina Johnson, one of several Black British characters, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Copyright Warner Bros.

While these explanations are firmly supported by direct quotations and multiple sources in Bacon-Smith's grounded research, I find them incommensurable with a phenomenon in the category of hurt/comfort fiction that I found and preserved at Remember Us.

A series of stories about Angelina Johnson in Harry Potter fandom form a different mold for hurt/comfort fiction. In *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower* by dangerous_angel, Angelina Johnson, a Black student older than Harry Potter who attends his wizarding school, comes into view as the subject of a hurt/comfort narrative along with a classmate named Montague. The mismatched pair forms a relationship of hurt and comfort through a traumatic episode that follows the pattern of the fanfic genre, but the characters' marginal qualities complicate the meaning of pain in fan fiction. Their relationship is especially notable as an encounter between minor characters, especially significant for its focus on Angelina as one of a few Black British-diasporic characters in Harry Potter. While the story satisfies a number of Bacon-Smith's criteria for hurt/comfort fiction, it also comprises a number of substantial departures from her model, not the least of which is the portrayal of a female character's suffering and a male character's identification with a woman through sympathy in the course of comforting her. Angelina's Blackness and her identification with the heroic virtues ascribed to Harry Potter's allies in the plot of the novels become outlets for character development in the story. The story provides an occasion to assess those values on a broader scale as well, as the wizarding fantasy in which the characters are involved takes on a racialized dimension tied to the novels' British setting. Finally, as the comforting Montague character assumes his position in dialogue with the hurt character, the traumatic features at the crux of the genre obtain a complementary discourse of reparation.

At the start of *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Angelina Johnson is alone, injured, and silent in the Astronomy Tower after her boyfriend, another student, has raped her and fled. She feels removed from herself, and the author describes this situation by evoking the shift in her sensibility in the terms of the Harry Potter fictions: "Being a Gryffindor was supposed to be about victories, the bright and the bold, and shouting what had to be said. But now she knew that was not all there was to her. Being her meant losses, dark shadows, and things that could not be said." Angelina's pain jeopardizes her sense of belonging as a member of the house of Gryffindor, a subset of students whose mascot is a lion and whose ranks include heroes like Harry Potter, his tragic dead parents, and

his best friends in the novels. Angelina feels betrayed, because her boyfriend was one of her Gryffindor classmates. She feels shut out from the discourse of heroism; the summary for the story is “Angelina loses her voice,” and the dominant symptom of Angelina’s trauma is her inability to speak and refusal to return letters of consolation from her friends. When Montague encounters her in the tower, the first impression he makes associates him with an opposing set of values. “For Montague, the best part of being a prefect was that he had the power to interrupt the pleasure of others.” As an agent of authority in the opposing house of Slytherin, represented by a snake, Montague is meant to play the antithesis to characters like Angelina. Montague’s characterization initially identifies him with the rapist, in part because he is a man encountering Angelina at the height of her vulnerability and in part because the external antagonist who instigates Angelina’s hurt has similarly abused his power to make her pleasure impossible. Yet at first sight, Montague has a visceral reaction to the signs of violence on Angelina’s body, and he feels a subsequent pang of sympathy:

He looked down and noticed the blood on her thighs and legs. Bile rose to his throat.

Not her, he thought frantically. He couldn’t come up with any reasoning behind his thought, but it was there.

Montague wanted to ask who did this to her, but he couldn’t find the words. Instead he lifted her gently and started for the infirmary.³⁷

Thus they begin a silent dialogue, and in so doing, they gradually assume complementary positions of hurt and comforting characters.

The silence that symptomatizes Angelina’s trauma affects Montague as well, but their mutual inability to communicate verbally yields to the resourcefulness of a fantastic trope in Harry Potter. In the novels and films, wizards communicate via pet owls carrying messages on parchment. Angelina will not respond to owls from her friends while she’s in the infirmary, and a stack of letters mounts at her bedside. When Montague’s Housemaster summons him to probe the incident and questions him about the time he has been spending at Angelina’s side, he is silent about accusations that he was the perpetrator. Veiling his sympathy with cynicism, he dismisses the allegations, claiming, “I don’t care what they think of me, neither if they hurt me. I only care about . . .”³⁸ The ellipses in the text convey his inability to express his compassion vocally, but they also gesture toward the space and the need for another medium.

Convinced of his innocence and his concern, the Housemaster asks Montague to write to Angelina. Montague notes, “You said she doesn’t answer owls from her friends,” but the Housemaster pointedly observes, “You are not her friend.” The first letter from Montague to Angelina follows in the text. Just as Montague moves away from opposition (“not her friend”) to take on the qualities of a comforting character with this idiosyncratic act, Angelina internalizes the consolation that acknowledges her hurt when she receives the owl:

Montague’s owl was ugly. There was no ifs, ands, or buts about it. The first time Angelina saw Dugan [the owl] she was so transfixed by his appearance that she’d forgotten to be annoyed or curious. Obviously the letter he carried was not from her friends or anyone she knew at Hogwarts. . . .

Her curiosity won out.³⁹

Angelina is “transfixed” by the owl, in a beautiful turn of phrase that captures both the marvelous affect of the story’s setting and the burgeoning connection that secures the respective positions of the two characters in the hurt/comfort relationship.

Trauma tends to feminize hurt characters in Bacon-Smith’s formulation, but Angelina Johnson is already female, and also Black, posing a problem to this equation. Angelina’s Blackness calls into question why feminization appears to take place through sexual violence in hurt/comfort fiction, because perpetrators of sexual violence against Black women have, historically, relied on the putative inferiority of Black womanhood to White femininity to withhold the resources to which Black women would be entitled if they were recognized as victims.⁴⁰ Angelina’s Black womanhood thus produces the grounding for a set of questions about loss that is comparable to that constructed by her fictitious context: in addition to feeling excluded from the meaning of Gryffindor identity, she fears that being a rape victim cuts off her access to the culturally specific implications of virginity. In part 2 of the story, dangerous_angel writes,

Her mother had given her much more freedom compared to her cousins and other girls of her status. “Do what you must, but keep your dignity,” she’d always said. Her dignity being her virginity. Her mother had hopes of marrying her into one of the old families from the Caribbean or Africa, who were rooted in a history that involved more than European wand waving.⁴¹

Deviating from the terms in which most Harry Potter characters pursue status by aspiring to become great wizards, this anomalous story sets

wizarding and a racialized economy of social capital at opposite poles. The opposition reflects Angelina's sense that womanhood limits her horizons to the fantasy of marrying well, but that fantasy is intelligible through the idiom of diasporic Blackness rather than wizarding. The stark opposition that Angelina perceives, denigrating "European wand waving," reflects the distortion wrought by her traumatic experience. Setting Blackness as the frame of reference for Angelina's aspirations, the author lends it a positive meaning in contrast to the wizarding world with which her hurt protagonist is now thoroughly disenchanted. Her subjection to the violence of rape has dashed Angelina's hopes with regard to both her possible destinies, reinscribing the zero-sum formulation. Montague's comfort entails presenting Angelina with an intermediate option, between the equally unattainable possibilities of marrying into the Black bourgeoisie on the condition of virginity and rejoining the wizarding world from which one of her own cohorts has severed her connection. To sympathize with Angelina's need to rediscover her own possibilities in life, Montague must do what seems impossible to him by compromising his own positions on the dynamics of the wizarding world.

Montague's primary reaction to Angelina's hurt is a desire to avenge her, so he confronts the perpetrator. Angelina's heritage again provides a frame of reference in which to understand her trauma. Fred Weasley, Angelina's erstwhile boyfriend, becomes the object of Montague's jealousy as the characters build a relationship through their correspondence. The act of revenge that seems imminent threatens to disrupt the hurt/comfort pairing, forming a triad instead of a dyad. The perpetrator usually stands outside the narrative in hurt/comfort, but in this instance, the antagonistic third character is the object of a related affect that catalyzes the comforting character's transformation in relation to the hurt character: mercy. The relationship does not become a triad because compassion allows Montague to understand Angelina in a way Fred does not. Montague questions this third character, and his reaction reveals how dangerous_angel has constructed the meaning of her Black female protagonist's subjectivity through the eyes of those who are sympathetic (Montague) as well as those who are hostile (Fred Weasley):

Weasley snorted bitterly. "You don't know anything, Montague. Angelina would've never married me." Montague turned back to him, his confusion evident. It was Weasley's turn to sneer. "You think you Slytherins are the only ones obsessed with bloodlines. You can trace your history back to Merlin's

time. She can do it back to tribes that existed before all the supposed great civilizations. Her parents would've never let her marry me. My family has no money. I'm nobody except another Englishman who knows nothing except what's going on in his own garden."⁴²

As he weighs the perpetrator's vain explanation of his actions, Montague recognizes that Angelina's heritage meant something to her that Weasley has misunderstood, and Montague judges him harshly. Montague responds to the perpetrator's insufficient account of himself by saying, "So that's why you did it then? To hold on to her?" In so doing, he mocks the perpetrator's warped logic. Montague does not dispute the valorization of Angelina's background that Weasley communicates, but he indicts him for lashing out with feelings of frustration and inadequacy. The implication of this encounter is that the two characters share somewhat similar impressions of the protagonist's cultural heritage, but Montague respects the exclusivity ascribed to Blackness in this formulation, while Fred resents it.

In her account of Angelina's anguish from her own point of view, the author encodes Black female heterosexuality as a source of pride that was vexed even before her trauma. In part 5 of the story, Angelina remembers thinking about marrying Fred just before the rape, but the radical act of violence dislodges her own desires from the fantasy. Again, Blackness is the frame of reference in relation to which Angelina could either retreat from or immerse herself in the wizarding world. The task of disabusing Angelina of misconceptions that were painfully amplified by Fred's actions assuages Montague's tendency toward violence. Instead of acting out in anger, he spares the rapist's life on the condition that he confesses his crime. Doing so would free Angelina from the task of naming her perpetrator as a prerequisite to reclaiming her wounded voice. By placing the responsibility where he feels it belongs, Montague attempts to lessen Angelina's burden. Mercy is a new role for him, and while it writes Fred out of the story, it leaves Montague with an unresolved dilemma. Because his anger remained intact when he took Fred as the object of his newfound mercy, Montague's unresolved feelings still cast doubt on his ability to become the comforting character Angelina will need.

At the end of the story, Montague is finally inspired to offer his hand for Angelina to hold. Previously, magical correspondence has taken the place of physical contact as the medium for intimacy in the hurt/comfort formula. In the context of the subgenre, the affectionate act of closure between these two characters is also an alternative to the violent physicality with

which Montague would have otherwise confronted Fred. In place of doing violence to Fred and closing a homosocial circuit of violence around Angelina's victimization, Montague perceives himself as the source of Angelina's comfort in a fashion similar to the act that had allowed Angelina to feel hurt. When he sees her again, Montague is transfixed by Angelina's beauty, the way she was transfixed by his queer-looking owl:

Angelina was not far away. She wore a white dress and was holding a dozen or so blood red roses.

Montague forgot to breathe. He'd remember this moment for as long as he lived. The moment when he'd felt something warm settle beside the anger, calming it and molding it into something new.⁴³

Montague's release of his anger provides the means for Angelina to acknowledge hers:

She could feel it now, the anger she'd been too afraid, too ashamed of feeling. She'd thought if she could bury it the world would remain unchanged. She'd visited the past and saw there was no truth in that.

After the violence has run its course, subsiding enough for Montague to identify thoroughly with the task of comfort and giving way to a righteous anger for Angelina, both characters are able to remember. Montague would "remember this moment for as long as he lived," and Angelina "visited the past" without the distortions of fear and shame. Hurt/comfort changes both of their relationships to anger and to memory, and in relation to the protagonist's Blackness and her gender, it displaces the implicit racial and sexual connotations of the fantasy genre. I read this story as an archive of the profound ambivalence that sympathizing with a Black British-diasporic character like Angelina Johnson involves. *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower* is part of a queer archive, insofar as it presents the radically nonheteronormative hurt/comfort genre, in which stories about hurt women, Black women, and heterosexual rape reside on the margins of the margins. The trope of innocence ironized by Angelina's wedding-white dress at the end of the story reminds the reader that a loss of innocence is in fact traumatic, and the author suggests that Montague can't quite remember whether Angelina is holding exactly a dozen roses or not, even though he will remember seeing her for the rest of his life. Even the most critical memories inevitably force us to confront the trauma of forgetting. In the visit to Remember Us that I recount to close this study, I examine a lapse in another genre formation that

contributes to the queer representation of diaspora and fantasy that Harry Potter represents.

Coda: Dean Thomas, Dean/Seamus

My final example is an unwritten chapter. In the time I have been reading fan fiction, my interest has turned from casual to scholarly, but something about it has been critical all the while. Finding characters of color in works that interested me, such as *Buffy* and the Harry Potter series, was compelling and pleasurable, but before discovering and taking on a role in the Remember Us archive, I knew no way to pursue or to preserve stories about them. Even though I did not know it, however, before and after the proliferation of fan cultures online, Black and American fans like me already possessed the power to extend our engagements with contemporary fantasy across national boundaries and across paradigms of race thinking. We could peer outward from the margins of popular works to reckon with subtle and even repressed features of the stories popular culture tells about us. The work that illustrates this power in action has already been written. I wanted to reflect on other examples from Harry Potter that were also encoded within a genre formation familiar to scholarship on fan fiction, but I found them lacking at Remember Us. Out of deference to those who laid the foundations for my views of power and pleasure in relation to speculative fiction and media, I expected to locate these examples elsewhere.

When I resumed work on the archive in the course of writing this chapter, the most daunting tasks before me were securing a process to enable fans to contribute new stories on an ongoing basis, on one hand, and locating stories that were linked to the archive from websites that had since moved or gone offline, on the other. These tasks are related, I now realize, through the desire to retrieve the site from a state of disrepair. One of the most powerful tools for recovering dead links to other sites was the Wayback Machine, a utility at web.archive.org that enables users to search for the content displayed at a given Web address through a database that contains versions of pages across the World Wide Web as they appeared at successive moments in time. The Wayback Machine enabled me to retrieve and subsequently offer access on an ongoing basis to stories that were once linked to Remember Us but had since disappeared when the server on which they were hosted went offline or the information was moved. The existence of the Wayback Machine is an

index of how volatile the networked structure of the Web can be, but it enables users to perceive and examine that instability instead of allowing content to vanish without a trace. I was unable to use this utility to recover dead links to a particular set of stories about a Harry Potter character that I intended to write about, however, because no such stories had ever been archived at Remember Us; therefore, even if they exist somewhere online, in the present or in the past, Remember Us has never been a venue through which to read them.

Were this study primarily posed as a critique of the limitations of prior inquiries in fan culture, my treatment of Dean/Seamus would have ended with a description of the problem exposed by my archive's inadequacy to the endeavor of remembering characters of color in popular fantasy narratives. Yet this chapter and *Speculative Blackness* as a whole are concerned with performing a reparative analysis of speculative fiction by outlining the organizing principles and resources necessary for a critical dialogue between the phenomena of race and genre, a dialogue that is not quite fully articulated in the history of Anglo–North American popular media. The Harry Potter section of Remember Us includes several stories about Dean Thomas, but it lacks any stories that represent the character in the formulation that is familiar to his appearance in the screen versions of these texts: his relationship with his canonical best friend, an Irish character named Seamus Finnegan. Instead of conceptualizing this absence as exclusion, thereby relegating responsibility for the stories in question to a past that I could only ever misrecognize through the lens of its putative failures, I wondered, how could I commemorate the unexpected turns this line of inquiry has taken in a meaningful way?

An archive of Dean/Seamus fan fiction existed once, but it is now defunct. A search for its address through the Wayback Machine, however, indicates that several versions of the site were indexed at Archive .org between 2004 and 2005. Upon arriving at the version archived on April 20, 2005, I am able to access several stories. Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan appear in each of these works of fan fiction, and they are each suitable for Remember Us according to its guidelines. Yet incorporating the contents of an entire archive from the past may be a task beyond the scope of Remember Us, as it currently exists.

Though my resources may not be adequate to the task of exploring Dean/Seamus, the exercise of seeking out a potential point of articulation between the two archives is instructive. As an archive that is gone but not forgotten, Dean/Seamus is replete with useful questions. Some of

them are familiar: what should we make of discrepancies between Dean Thomas's personality in these works and his characterization in J. K. Rowling's novels and Alfred Enoch's film performances, and how does his sexuality as construed within the slash genre portray Black masculinity? What meaning does his Black British–diasporic identity hold for Remember Us, particularly in conjunction with Seamus Finnegan's White ethnic identity as an Irish character in a British context? A minoritarian disposition informs my orientation toward reading slash, but my position as a Black gay man is not marginal in the same ways that the slash genre is marginalized. My desire to read Dean/Seamus proceeds in part from my position as a fan and a scholar identified with intellectual, diasporic, and queer meanings of Blackness and a subset of cisgender male privileges that sit out of alignment with the presumptive national, female, and White inventors of slash fiction.

Feeling out of alignment is a fruitful place to start examining the disjuncture between Dean/Seamus and Remember Us. The two archives are related through a structure that follows what Brent Edwards, writing on international correspondences between and divergences among Black Francophone and African American intellectuals in twentieth-century literature, calls “*décalage*,” characterized by disjuncture in space and time. Edwards describes the African diaspora as a structure that is “*décalée*,” like a table with legs of unequal length: the plane that composes its surface shifts disposition in space, and does so differently at different times, when a wedge or artificial supporting structure that evens it out is removed.⁴⁴ *Décalage* is appropriate metaphor for diaspora because it resists both definition and translation, and it indexes the unevenness of relationships among Black peoples across diaspora. I would adapt this term to the context of disparate acts of remembrance in fandom by translating it to mean “disarticulation.” The diasporic frame of reference through which I have identified characters in this chapter accommodates their different relationships to Blackness, Whiteness, and Anglo–North American national identities in the eyes of fans. In the case of Dean Thomas, the failure to perform of an act of remembrance that would have articulated the archive of Dean/Seamus with Remember Us leaves his role in the subject formations that compose contemporary popular fantasy narratives disarticulated, separated at the place that would join them. Disarticulation, before a connection forms or after it is severed, might be an appropriate stage at which to examine a subject who is already positioned at the margins rather than in the center of a canon formation.

An awareness of globalization as a set of real and imagined possibilities, not only in the information age but in the ages-old movements that have spread diasporic cultures across the globe, disabuses scholars and fans of the notion that racial and national difference are peculiarly divisive in ways that genre—embodied in representational conventions, in idiomatic expressions, in textual strategies, in constructions of setting—is not. The fictions I have examined in this chapter attest to the power of culture—embodied in diaspora—to forge connections, and they demonstrate that dominant narratives propagated in popular media can sever them; yet critical interpretation can repair those divides. A “Remember Us Manifesto, version 2.0” would take the ubiquity of encounters with racial difference in popular media, rather than their invisibility, as its point of departure. Rather than assuming that the technologically mediated world of fandom or the wide orbit of speculative fiction could possibly be an unproblematic, neutral, racially unmarked space, the fan fiction at Remember Us and elsewhere elaborates on fantasies and realities in which Blackness is already an integral part and always will be.

CODA

THE CHAPTERS OF THIS STUDY gesture toward the eye-opening potential inherent in mobilizing an interpretive apparatus in SF studies across media that integrates critical perspectives on Black cultural traditions into scholarly approaches to the genre. As I have argued throughout the book, this work entails transforming the modes of reading that we bring to SF texts and breaking down the boundaries that circumscribe science fiction, fantasy, utopia, horror, and supernatural works within the larger field of cultural production. We must always be willing to reconsider what speculative fiction is to maintain its relevance to literary, paraliterary, and popular mediations of race matters and other social concerns. We must first cultivate an awareness of the complexity of racial identity and racism as powerful determinants of social relations in the existing world, and then we can situate our analysis of genre in the context of a fuller understanding of the field of cultural production. Ultimately, I argue, we can only appreciate the relationship between Blackness and speculative fiction by assessing them in terms of the historically distinct circumstances of their equally strange careers as the focus of intellectual endeavors such as African American and American studies, literary criticism, media studies, and areas significant to the production of knowledge across the arts and sciences. Rather than conceptualizing one category as a phenomenon nested within the other, we must tease apart the logic of race and genre, and we must embrace the synergies as well as the tensions that encounters between them will always produce.

In future studies of race and genre, I hope cultural critics will find it useful to refer to this book as the point of departure for revisionist interventions of their own. Whereas I have submerged questions regarding what defines speculative fiction and what constitutes Black cultural production

within discussions of specific texts, the diverse works I have examined over the course of this study should encourage scholars in SF studies and Black cultural criticism to read promiscuously and strategically. Examples of how to craft strategies for reading critically within and across genre traditions abound in the schools of thought that are now coming to bear on Blackness and speculative fiction. For instance, whereas critics like Elyce Rae Helford, in her essay “(E)raced Visions: Women of Color and Science Fiction in the United States,” have spoken to the ways in which the problem I have outlined as the Whiteness of science fiction alienates Black women from a dimension of their own creativity, the career of Jewelle Gomez speaks to the urgency and the possibility of approaches to speculative fiction that are grounded in Black lesbian feminism. In her 1985 essay “Black Women Heroes: Here’s Reality, Where’s the Fiction?,” Gomez asked how we might reconceptualize Black women’s histories as a source of inspiration for the kind of imaginative fictions then emerging in the feminist SF movement.¹ The essay serves as a preface of sorts to her collection *The Gilda Stories*, a set of interlinked works of fiction chronicling the immortal life of a vampire with the worldly identity of a Black woman. Yet the impact of her work resonates even more deeply once we contextualize it within her career as a whole, alongside her contributions to the seminal *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and *Black Queer Studies*. By juxtaposing the erasure of Black women’s legacies from the genre, which Helford documents, with appraisals of the ways in which authors like Gomez have enlisted their conventions in the service of their own ideals, we begin to perform reparation. Redefining cultural production in this way entails undoing past failures of imagination.

Another way to reconstruct the relationship between Blackness and speculative fiction is to think in concrete terms about the moments at which we employ genre distinctions. In the formulation I cited from Samuel Delany in the introduction, the “markers” that customarily distinguish literary texts from the paraliterary inhibit the movement of certain values across categories in the field of cultural production, while facilitating the movement of others.² In theories with which I have engaged in this book, SF critics have argued that certain works surmount the strata of cultural capital by linking interventions in the genre to modernist, postmodernist, and marginal efforts to destabilize literary canon formation. Brian Aldiss once lodged such an effort by installing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a point of origin for science fiction, and Marlene Barr’s theory of “feminist fabulation” posits a critical orientation to literature in which Margaret

Atwood, Octavia Butler, and Doris Lessing represent defining examples of postmodernism and speculative fiction simultaneously.³ In another vein, Paul Kincaid has criticized the task of defining the genre in favor of a genealogical approach to understanding the way in which shared classifications imply “family resemblances” between works, and Delany has highlighted the reading protocols through which we understand that, in speculative fiction, the meanings of familiar words and images diverge from their mundane counterparts. As an alternative to fixing the location of SF writing on the cultural terrain, more granular reading strategies emphasize the distinct social and even cognitive situations that make texts legible.

As I have pointed out in close readings throughout this book, supplementing literary approaches with tactics germane to performance and visual culture, attentive considerations of racialized language and imagery suture the hypothetical forms of marginalization envisioned in speculative fiction to the lived situations they invoke. Understanding the significance of Blackness in science fiction therefore requires us to reach for fantastic possibilities while we are already entangled in the web of racial connotations that structures popular culture. In other words, we might only comprehend what it means to be a robot, an alien, or a ghost by learning about what it means to be Black.

Taking a critical eye to the way in which we categorize works on the basis of telling differences helps us to apprehend the internal logic of cultural production. Yet it is also enables us to articulate what cultural production means in relation to other facets of our everyday lives and social experiences. The impetus for my investigation was a recognition that genre is not only important to itself but to the world it mediates as well. I recommend that we reflect on the ways in which we might mobilize the logic of genre to communicate and further our critical priorities more effectively. We can observe a precedent for this work in Kali Tal’s reflections on the migrations that have shaped her own bookshelves:

When, in community college, I began to study African American literature, I kept those course texts on other shelves. Before I reached graduate school, however, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*, Sam Greenlee’s *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, and John Williams’s *The Man Who Cried I Am* all migrated from the African American literature shelf to the science fiction shelf, while Samuel R. Delany’s books and Octavia Butler’s books migrated to the African American literature shelf when I discovered, in the early 1980s, that each author is African American.⁴

What Kali Tal is offering here is an example of the sort of versatile classificatory practice that characterizes an African Americanist approach to the use of genre distinctions. Her reading of Greenlee and Ellison alongside the likes of Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler employs a critical apparatus that can handle the ways in which Blackness and speculative fiction exceed their prescribed limitations. The ensuing rethinking of Blackness and speculative fiction asks what it means to occlude knowledge from the watchful eye of White supremacist governance, to fictionalize scientific racism, and to question our destiny.

In addition to unsettling our libraries, we might assemble works like Bob Kaufman's "Abomunist Manifesto," Reginald Hudlin's comics, and Barbara Chase-Riboud's historical novels, along with the growing body of work by Nalo Hopkinson, Nisi Shawl, Tananarive Due, Andrea Hairston, Steven Barnes, P. Djeli Clark, Brandon Massey, Nnedi Okorafor, Kiese Laymon, Rasheedah Phillips, and too many more bright Black stars to name, under the aegis of what I have called the speculative fiction of Blackness. I have invoked this phrase to describe how Black authors and artists take part in an intellectual tradition that encompasses print literature while also enacting racial identification and performing critiques of racial ideology in ways that the disciplinary conventions I have assayed in this book can hardly imagine. Much of *Speculative Blackness* has concerned how the entrenchment of speculative fiction in the norms of popular culture limits the meaning of Blackness in the genre, but in this work I am also constantly looking forward to what Blackness can do, with the aid of speculative fiction, to transform cultural politics. I offer a final recommendation that we read Black authors' and artists' contributions to science fiction, fantasy, and utopia in all media with an eye toward their implications for redefining the relationship between speculative fiction and common knowledge.

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I can hardly speak about the role of José Muñoz in helping me become the person to write this book. I can say without doubt that he believed in this project with the same enthusiasm that I do. I wish he could read it.

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NOTES

Introduction

1. Jeanne Gomoll, "An Open Letter to Joanna Russ," *Aurora* SF 10, no. 1 (1986–87): 7–10.
2. Marlene Barr, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); Daphne Patai, "Utopia for Whom?," *Aphra* 5, no. 3 (1974): 2–16; Patai, "Beyond Defensiveness: Feminist Research Strategies," in *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, ed. Marlene Barr and Nicholas Smith, 148–69 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983).
3. Some quality book-length studies of Delany's writing include Jeffrey Tucker, *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel Delany—Race, Identity, and Difference* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); James Sallis, *Ash of Stars: On the Writings of Samuel Delany* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); Carl Freedman, *Conversations with Samuel R. Delany* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); and Michael Peplow and Robert Bravard, eds., *Samuel Delany: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography, 1962–1979* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980). Delany's many published interviews, memoirs, correspondence, and critical writings are also informative. Critical essays on Delany's works are too numerous to count, but some examples include chapters of books by Madhu Dubey and Sharon DeGraw that I cite throughout this work.
4. Samuel Delany, "The *Para•doxa* Interview: Inside and Outside the Canon," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 205.
5. *Ibid.*, 204.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (New York: New Press, 1998), 24.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 25.
10. De Witt Kilgore, *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 12.

11. Charles Saunders, "Why Blacks Should Read (and Write) Science Fiction," in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, ed. Sheree Thomas, 398–404 (New York: Warner Aspect, 2000).
12. Steven Barnes, author's note to *Far beyond the Stars* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998).
13. Ron Eglash, "Race, Sex, and Nerds: From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 49–64.
14. Charles Saunders's essay in the anthology *Dark Matter* argues that Resnick's fiction extends traditional approaches to thinking about race in science fiction rather than revising them.
15. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 149.
16. *Ibid.*, 128.
17. Scholarship at the intersection of Blackness and speculative fiction has many names, and I have selected only a few. Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman, eds., *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism, and the Speculative* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), collects essays representing a variety of approaches. Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford, 2008), is also especially notable.
18. It is hard not to attribute some analytical significance to the resonance between "Afrofuturism" and the title of Kilgore's later book, *Astrofuturism*, but it is unclear whether the resonance is meant to be critical.
19. Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (1993): 736.
20. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2012).
21. Dery, "Black to the Future," 738.
22. Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 5.
23. Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), makes a similar point by observing how much of the shocking innovation in surrealism resulted from European artists appropriating African objects—including the bodies of Black people—as living documents of their alternative worldview.
24. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 160–66.
25. Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent, 1941–1945*, ed. Daniel Maximin, trans. Keith Walker (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 38.
26. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.
27. Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

28. Julie Erhart, "Picturing *What If*: Julie Dash's Speculative Fiction," *Camera Obscura* 13, no. 2 (1996): 117–18. See also Houston Baker and Julie Dash, "Not without My Daughters," *Transition*, no. 57 (1992): 163.
29. See James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Holt, 1995), and commentaries including E. Frances White, "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: The Alchemy of Race and Sexuality," in *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison: Comparative Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Lovalerie King and Lynn Scott, 239–59 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), and Richard Schur, "Unseen or Unspeakable? Racial Evidence in Baldwin and Morrison's Nonfiction," in *ibid.*, 205–21. A similar emphasis on interpretive frames of reference that defy law and conventional standards of reason characterizes critical race theory, including Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

1. Josh Brandon's Blues

1. Some fans consider the Science Correspondence Club, founded in Chicago, the first fan organization. As its name suggests, its members pioneered the tradition of written correspondence that would connect fans across locales. The Scienceeers' publication *The Planet* was a prototype for fanzines, but *The Comet*, later titled *Cosmology*, organ of the Science Correspondence Club, fulfilled a similar purpose early in 1930. Glasser notes, however, that the Scienceeers' meetings were reported in the *New York Evening World*, making their activity as a science fiction organization among the first recognized by the general public. Allen Glasser, "History of the Scienceeers: The First New York City Science Fiction Club, 1929," *Timebinders: Preserving Fannish History*, <http://www.fanac.org/timebinders/scienceeers.html>. Previously published in *First Fandom Magazine* 4 (June 1961). See also Sam Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom*, reprint ed. (New York: Hyperion Press, 1974), 8–11.
2. Glasser, "History of the Scienceeers."
3. Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*, 10.
4. The opposition between putatively serious, constructive, or "sercon" fans and "fannish" fans accounts for significant divergence between members of groups like the short-lived Whimsical Amateur Press Association, a group devoted to humor, and the National Fantasy Fan Federation, discussed later in this chapter. "Fannish" fans might be said to pursue fandom for its own sake, emphasizing the pleasurable social interaction it provides, whereas serious, constructive fans maintain more deliberate involvement with the professional publication of science fiction. Chronicles of fandom in subsequent years parse distinctions between more subtle cases than Brandon, who falls decisively into the fannish camp. See Rob Latham, "New Worlds and the New Wave in Fandom: Fan Culture and the Reshaping of Science Fiction in the Sixties," *Extrapolation* 47, no. 2 (2006): 296–315.
5. Terry Carr, "The Fake Fan," in *The Cacher of the Rye*, by Carl Brandon (Madison, Wisc.: Obsessive Press, 1982), 4.

6. Sam Moskowitz, "The Origins of Science Fiction Fandom: A Reconstruction," in *Science Fiction Fandom*, ed. Joe Sanders, 17–36 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).
7. *Egoboo* was a term fans used to describe the objective of any activity that would boost the ego of a fan—a positive review of one's fanzine, high placement in a poll about popularity or talent, or widespread name recognition, for instance.
8. Walt Willis, *The Enchanted Duplicator*, in *Gutenberg's Bible*, ed. Greg Hills (1994), http://fanac.org/fanzines/Enchanted_Duplicator/Enchanted-00.html.
9. "The Press: Amazing! Astounding!" *Time*, July 10, 1939, 34.
10. Willis, *Enchanted Duplicator*.
11. Bob Stewart, *Boo!* 2 (February 1953), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections, J. Lloyd Eaton Science Fiction Collection, Thomas Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside.
12. Poul Anderson, *Brain Wave* (New York: iBooks, 2003).
13. Carl Brandon, "Brain Ripple," in *Boo!* 2.
14. Ibid.
15. rich brown, "Slan," Dr. Gafia's Fan Terms, http://fanac.org/Fannish_Reference_Works/Fan_terms-08.html.
16. Brandon, "Brain Ripple."
17. Anderson, *Brain Wave*, 54.
18. Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*, 10.
19. "My sole experience with duplication methods had been the hectograph. My mother—who ran a private school—had a hectograph, and used it to run off school papers. Being her only child, I was often required to assist in this tedious process, which involves placing a sheet of copy paper on a mat (or flat pan) of hecto jelly, smoothing it down, letting it wait a moment or two, and then peeling it off. The hecto process produces from 35 to 50 readable copies—maximum—in blurry purple print. During the Depression fans used hecto a lot more than they have since, and that's why FAPA originally limited its membership to fifty. I've seen some hectoed fanzines of the forties and they are occasionally impressive but fade over the years (especially in strong light) and represent at best a marginal duplicating process." Ted White, "Twenty-Five Years? That's —," in *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* 7 (November 1976), http://fanac.org/fanzines/SF_Five_Yearly/sffy6-22.html.
20. W. B. Proudfoot, *The Origin of Stencil Duplicating* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 34–36.
21. Ibid.
22. rich brown, "On Topic: Origins of Fandom," <http://trufen.net/article.pl?sid=05/01/03/0915255>.
23. Once, at the end of his own term as official arbiter and failing a proper election, Terry Carr elevated Carl Brandon to the position by proclamation, for nine hours. Carl had only known about it for three hours, according to a letter he sent from Ron Ellik's house the following day, but he used his brief incumbency as an occasion to campaign on his own behalf. Writing of Carl Brandon's tenure several months after he was elected official arbiter, Larry Stark notes, "He has . . . exerted a profoundly

- calming effect on the Cult, through his relaxed and sensible attitude toward all problems which have arisen. In that sense, he is very closely aligned with the temper of the organization at this time." Terry Carr, *Oh Fout* 4 (October 1957). See also Carl Brandon, "Carl's Page," *Oh Fout* 5 (October 1957), and Larry Stark, "Files on Parade," in Agenbite of Inwit, *Fantasy Rotator* 47 (The Cult, June 1958), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
24. Terry Carr, "History of the Cult," in Aton, *Fantasy Rotator* 27 (The Cult, June 1956), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 25. Dave Rike recounts reading *Coup*, among other reasons, to locate the first magazines published by and for gay men in the United States, *The Mattachine Review* and *One*, which were also distributed surreptitiously through the mail. Dave Rike, *Califan* 3 (June 1955), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 26. Dean Grennell, *Grue* 21 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, August 1954), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 27. Later, Gestetner invented a reproduction method called Gestafax that could stencil photographs and other detailed images on its mimeograph machines. When Grennell reproduced this photo, U.S. mimeograph machines used a method called Stenofax to reproduce photos that could be cut and pasted alongside stenciled text. Grennell refers to the existing system and the way he adapted it in the text of this issue of *Grue*. Ibid.
 28. G. M. Carr, *Gemzine* 4–5 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, August 1954), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 29. Vernon McCain, *Birdsmith* 10 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, 1955), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 30. Sam Martinez, *Sambo* 2 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, May 1956), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 31. Brandon to Vernon McCain, quoted in McCain, "The Matter of Carl Brandon," *The Fantasy Amateur* 76 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, August 1956), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 32. Richard Eney, "Leeh," in Jim Caughran and Joe Siclari, *Fancyclopedia* 3, <http://fancyclopedia.editme.com/>.
 33. Vernon McCain, "The Matter of the Larry Shaws and Damon Knight," *The Fantasy Amateur* 75 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, May 1956), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 34. Vernon McCain, "The Matter of Joan Carr," *Fantasy Amateur* 75.
 35. Vernon McCain, "Secretary-Treasurer's Report," *Fantasy Amateur* 81 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, November 1957), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 36. Robert Burns, *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, Cambridge ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Brandon, *Cacher of the Rye*, 65.
 37. Brandon, *Cacher of the Rye*, 65.
 38. Dick Eney, "Ploy," in Caughran and Siclari, *Fancyclopedia*.
 39. Carl Brandon, "Sixteen," in Aton, *Fantasy Rotator* 27.

40. Jack Harness to Terry Carr, and Larry Stark to Terry Carr, *Atonic Aftermath*, *Fantasy Rotator* 27 1/2 (The Cult, July 10, 1956), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
41. For no apparent reason, the Scarecrow notes that the Enchanted Duplicator resides in the BNF's "slan-palace." The fans in Brandon's adventure also espouse a popular slogan among West Coast fans campaigning to hold the World Science Fiction Convention in Southgate, California, in 1958, in a subsequent allusion: "'Oh!' exclaimed Dorothy. 'Are you going to leave Iz to go to South Gate?' Her two friends turned to look at her. 'Of course not,' said the Lion. 'We shall merely follow this very same road until we come to the south gate of the Amber City, where it's always 1958, and where the annual convention is always held.' Dorothy was astounded at this, and wondered that such a wonderful fairy fandom could exist, where time stood still in 1958 and all roads led to the Enchanted Duplicator." Carl Brandon, *The BNF of Iz* (Falls Church, Va.: ASDFGHJLibrary, 1959), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
42. L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900; repr., New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1982).
43. Dick Eney, "Blog," in Caughran and Siclari, *Fancyclopedia*.
44. The red bug represents editor Redd Boggs, originator of the second edition of the *Fancyclopedia* reference guide eventually completed by Dick Eney; Boggs was also a former official editor of FAPA. Dick Eney, "*Fancyclopedia* II: (Why There Isn't Any)," in *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* 2 (1956), http://fanac.org/fanzines/SF_Five_Yearly/sffy2-40.html.
45. Brandon, *BNF of Iz*.
46. My concurrence with Carr's imputing racism to Wetzel relies on more than this veiled depiction. In his biographical essay on Brandon in *Cacher of the Rye*, Carr recounts that Wetzel often denigrated Harlan Ellison's professed sympathy for the civil rights struggle by calling him "Harlem Ellison" in print. On one occasion, Wetzel referred to Ellison several times in one letter involving a dispute over the use of pseudonyms: "Incidentally, do any of your readers know if Harlem Ellison's confessions of a kleptomaniac are a hoax? Harlem CERTAINLY WOULDN'T admit having such a psycho—or would he? Harlem does not believe that Multog is an alias of mine but that Multog really exists as an individual! On the other hand, when John Branamen wrote Harlem a letter and sent a sub, the damnfool Harlem sends Branamen's money to me and tells me in nasty words to stop sending him letters under fake names! Honestly, I don't know what to think now. Let Harlem prove that John Branamen is a creation of my pen. Yet he doesn't believe me when I say Multog is a fictitious entity of mine, invented by me. Gasp . . . I am getting so mixed up I think I better quit now before I start believing Harlem is really a shoplifter working fulltime with a mob." Wetzel later refers to Redd Boggs as "Dead Dogs" in the same letter. George Wetzel to John Hitchcock, in *Umbra* 6 (1955), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections. Wetzel substantiates his ardor for Lovecraft in a review of a Lovecraft bibliography, including a show of deference to the authoritative August Derleth, a writer in the Lovecraft circle; meanwhile, Wetzel's own fiction imitates

- Lovecraft's style. Despite the reputations they have earned for themselves, the racism of individual fans like Wetzel or authors like Lovecraft is not the focus of my critique. I would argue instead that Wetzel is an example of racist traditions that are thoroughly grounded in the history and critical traditions of speculative fiction. See Carr, "Fake Fan," 5. See also George Wetzel, "Book Review: *A Lovecraft Bibliography*," *Destiny: Tales of Science and Fantasy* 8 (Spring 1953), <http://fanac.org/fanzines/Destiny/Destiny8-30.html>, and Wetzel, "The Gothic Horror," *Fan-Fare* 3 (May 1953), <http://fanac.org/fanzines/Fan-Fare/Fan-Fare33-10.html>. For more on Lovecraft, see the work of S. T. Joshi, including the collection David Schultz and S. T. Joshi, eds., *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H. P. Lovecraft* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), and Michel Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, against Life* (San Francisco: Believer Books, 2005).
47. Brandon, *BNF of Iz*.
 48. Dick Eney, "Cry Crowd," in Caughran and Siclari, *Fancyclopedia*.
 49. Ted White, "Publisher's Note," in Brandon, *BNF of Iz*.
 50. Baum, *Wizard of Oz*.
 51. White, "Publisher's Note."
 52. Ted White, "Uffish Scrawlings," *Void* 15 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, March 1959), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 53. Bill Evans, "Secretary-Treasurer's Report," *Fantasy Amateur* 84 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, August 1958); Stark, "Files on Parade."
 54. John McQuiston, "John Clellon Holmes, 62, Poet and Novelist of the Beat Generation," *New York Times*, March 31, 1988, B1.
 55. rich brown, "Post-Sputnik Fandom (1957–1990)," in Sanders, *Science Fiction Fandom*, 75–102.
 56. *Ibid.*, 73.
 57. Michael Ashley, *Transformations: The Story of the Science Fiction Magazines from 1950 to 1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 70.
 58. True to form, when fans poked fun at Bradbury's writing style in the 1950s, they combined the overwrought prose of *The Martian Chronicles* with rumors of his work on a film adaptation of *Moby Dick*. The result, in *Grue*, was a parody called "The Million-Year White Whale." Dean Grennell, *Grue* 20 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, May 1954), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 59. Carl Brandon, *On the Road*, in *Innuendo* 8 (The Cult, August 1958), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 60. Rike, *Califan* 3.
 61. Will Jenkins to Terry Carr, in *Innuendo* 9 (July 1959); Vic Ryan to Terry Carr, in *Innuendo* 10 (December 1959), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
 62. Roger Horrocks to Terry Carr, in *Innuendo* 9.
 63. Norman Metcalf to Terry Carr, in *Innuendo* 9.
 64. Carl Brandon described Peter Graham as a moldy fig, as well, in an exchange between the two where Graham was writing both sides of the conversation. Peter Graham, "Carl Brandon," in Arbogast, *Fantasy Rotator* 30 (The Cult, May 1957), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.

65. Brandon to Larry Stark, in Lingam, *Fantasy Rotator* 35 (The Cult, June 1958), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
66. Andrew Ross, "Hip, and the Long Front of Color," in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, 65–101 (New York: Routledge, 1991).
67. An excellent scholarly discussion of Bob Kaufman's legacy occurs in Barbara Christian, "Whatever Happened to Bob Kaufman," in *The Beats: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Lee Bartlett, 107–14 (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1981).
68. Carr, "Fake Fan," 15.
69. Bill Evans, "Secretary-Treasurer's Report," in *Fantasy Amateur* 85 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, November 1958), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
70. Esmond Adams to Terry Carr, in *Innuendo* 9.
71. Walt Willis, "The Harp That Once or Twice," *Oopsla* 26 (1958), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
72. Nick and Noreen Falasca, *The Devil's Motorboat* 1 (1959), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
73. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, with Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts, and Bibliography* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1986), 143.
74. Allen Billy Crider, "Ace Books," in *Mass Market Publishing in America* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 5.
75. Avram Davidson, "Carl Brandon," *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, July 1962.
76. Jeanne Gomoll, "About This Book," in Brandon, *Cacher of the Rye*.
77. "Past WisCons," <http://www.wiscon.info/history.php>. See also *Internet Speculative Fiction Database*, s.v. "Suzette Haden Elgin," http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?Suzette_Haden_Elgin.
78. Terry Carr, "Carl Brandon Index," in Brandon, *Cacher of the Rye*, 71–74.
79. *Null-F* 22 (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, November 1961), Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz Fanzine Collections.
80. Carr, "Carl Brandon Index."

2. Space Race Woman

1. Sharon DeGraw, "Burroughs," in *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction*, 1–52 (New York: Routledge, 2007).
2. Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (New York: Verso, 1997), 16.
3. Nichelle Nichols, *Beyond Uhura: Star Trek and Other Memories* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1994), 122.
4. Nichelle Nichols, "BBC Online-Cult-Star Trek-Nichelle Nichols-Whoopi Goldberg," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/st/interviews/nichols/page4.shtml>.
5. Kilgore, *Astrofuturism*, 215.
6. Tom Godwin, "The Cold Equations," *Astounding Science Fiction*, August 1954.
7. Nichols, *Beyond Uhura*, 140.

8. Ibid., 141.
9. Ibid., 145–48.
10. Ibid., 147.
11. Ibid., 154.
12. Ibid., 148.
13. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, 357–83 (New York: New Press, 1995).
14. Teresa De Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 13.
15. The previous instance took place between Nancy Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. in a variety show, *Movin’ with Nancy*.
16. Nichols, *Beyond Uhura*, 159.
17. “The Man Trap,” *Star Trek: The Original Series—The Complete First Season*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Marc Daniels, aired September 8, 1966 (Los Angeles: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD.
18. William Shatner and Chris Kreski, *Star Trek Memories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 212.
19. Penley, *NASA/Trek*, 53–54.
20. Ibid., 3.
21. Ibid., 96.
22. Ibid., 98.
23. Ibid., 24.
24. Nichols, *Beyond Uhura*, 222.
25. Ibid., 225.
26. Penley, *NASA/Trek*, 20.
27. Ibid., 58.

3. The Immortal Storm

1. This chapter arrives in the watershed of a significant article, Ramzi Fawaz, “‘Where No X-Man Has Gone Before!’ Mutant Superheroes and the Cultural Politics of Popular Fantasy in Postwar America,” *American Literature* 83, no. 2 (2011): 355–88. The essay offers a treatment of the comics in question as documents of emergent political discourses in “popular fantasy” in the 1970s. It also provides the basis for a book by Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
2. This chapter focuses on issues of the *X-Men* comics that resumed the publication of the title (after the initial cancellation of the original series that had begun in 1963) with a new #1 in 1975 and a related title, *New Mutants*. Storm has been a featured character in many other manifestations of the X-Men: in the comic books *X-Treme X-Men*, *Ultimate X-Men*, and *X-Men Adventures*; in other Marvel comics, including a post-2000 revival of *Black Panther*—subsequently adapted for an animated series;

- a *Storm* miniseries; *Fantastic Four*, a direct-to-video pilot for an animated series titled *X-Men: Pryde of the X-Men*; several animated series beginning in the 1990s; and five feature films.
3. Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).
 4. Laura Mulvey, "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative, and Historical Experience," *History Workshop Journal* 23, no. 1 (1987): 11.
 5. Anna Beatrice Scott, "Superpower vs. Supernatural: Black Superheroes and the Quest for a Mutant Reality," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 3 (2006): 303–4.
 6. Rita Kempley, "Too Too Divine; Movies' 'Magic Negro' Saves the Day, but at the Cost of His Soul," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2003, C1.
 7. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
 8. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 46.
 9. I borrow this formulation from Black feminist critics who have pointed out how "multiple consciousness" structures Black women's subjectivity, expanding on W. E. B. Du Bois's initial formulation of double-consciousness as the distinguishing feature of African American identity. See Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 293–318 (New York: New Press, 1995).
 10. Peter Sanderson, "The Perfect Storm," *Back Issue* 8 (February 2005): 62.
 11. Claremont would later write about Storm's ancestry in a tradition of priestesses, lapsing into the same fantasizing about Africa to weave "belief structures" out of whole cloth. In the origin narrative I discuss from *X-Men* 102, he makes an effort to construct a rationale in the material circumstances of the region by depicting Storm using her powers to save the village in question from a drought. *Ibid.*, 68.
 12. Chris Claremont et al., *X-Men* 102 (December 1975), reprinted in *Classic X-Men* 10 (June 1987).
 13. Sanderson, "Perfect Storm," 68.
 14. Umberto Eco offers a theory of chronology in comic books and strips that essentially suspends the passage of time from one adventure to the next in "The Myth of Superman." A similar phenomenon provides a plausible pretext for maintaining World War II as the scene of Captain America's origin narrative. The *Captain America Comics* series of the 1940s faded into obscurity, but the character was revived for ongoing adventures in the 1960s. In an Avengers comic book in 1964, Captain America was revived from suspended animation in the arctic after an indeterminate length of time. Thus the character could remember the 1940s and lay claim to a World War II scientific experiment as the source of his super-soldier powers, as he continued to fight in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A similar logic undergirds the film adaptations of comic books that frequently bring plots conceived based on the politics of earlier decades into the present to remain relevant to contemporary audiences. Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *The*

Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts, 107–24 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

15. Recent scholarship observes the marketing of Black superheroes as a graphic mediation of the aggressive Black masculinity portrayed in popular films like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *Shaft* (both 1971). Rob Lendrum's account of blaxploitation comics ties the hypermasculinity of Black superheroes to Wallace's critique of Black macho. He also points out that back-talking Black women often appeared as the heroes' antagonists in blaxploitation comics, testifying to the overarching tension between Black macho and the myth of the superwoman. The focus on Black masculinity in these recent comics studies and the epiphenomenal status they accord to Black womanhood in the medium obfuscate the presence of heroines like Misty Knight and Storm. These critiques might shed light on Storm's role in the *X-Men*, furthermore, by treating the performance of Black womanhood as a central concern rather than a subplot in an androcentric narrative of Blackness in comics. See Rob Lendrum, "The Super Black Macho: One Baaad Mutha: Black Superhero Masculinity in 1970s Mainstream Comic Books," *Extrapolation* 46, no. 3 (2005): 360–72, and Joe Wlodarz, "Beyond the Black Macho: Queer Blaxploitation," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 53 (Spring 2004): 10–25.
16. Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial Press, 1979), 154.
17. In contemporary comics, Misty Knight fights alongside an Asian American heroine in a title called *Daughters of the Dragon*.
18. Chris Claremont et al., *The Uncanny X-Men: From the Ashes* (New York: Marvel Comics, 1990), 87.
19. Sanderson, "Perfect Storm," 69.
20. See Juliet Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: Free Press, 1987).
21. This scene was iconic enough to have versions of it produced in several adaptations of the *X-Men* comics, including the Saturday morning cartoon *X-Men: The Animated Series* and the film inspired by the Phoenix saga, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, directed by Brett Ratner (Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.
22. Claremont et al., *From the Ashes*, 43.
23. *Ibid.*, 73.
24. Actors from Forest Whitaker to Robert De Niro, neither of whom is Japanese, have used the ronin archetype to play out gender and class tensions vexing their heroic characters. *Ronin*, directed by John Frankenheimer (Santa Monica, Calif.: MGM Home Entertainment, 1998), DVD; *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, directed by Jim Jarmusch (Santa Monica, Calif.: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD.
25. Claremont et al., *From the Ashes*, 121.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Sanderson, "Perfect Storm," 69.
28. Claremont et al., *From the Ashes*, 133.
29. *Ibid.*, 87.
30. Crystal Parikh, *An Ethics of Betrayal: The Politics of Otherness in Emergent U.S. Literatures and Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 2.

31. Ibid.
32. Shiras was among the “women of wonder” whose contributions to science fiction Pamela Sargent reclaimed in the 1970s feminist SF anthologies by that title. The first “children of the atom” story, “In Hiding,” was published in 1948; with it Shiras began, slightly before Ray Bradbury, to offer an enduring fictional portrait of a generation of people born after the advent of nuclear power and atomic weapons. See *Internet Speculative Fiction Database*, s.v. “Wilmar H. Shiras,” <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?Wilmar%20H.%20Shiras>, and Pamela Sargent, *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women* (New York: Vintage, 1974).
33. Sanderson, “Perfect Storm,” 71.
34. Kate Kaul, “Vulnerability, for Example: Disability Theory as an Extraordinary Demand,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 25, no. 1 (2013). I am also indebted to my colleagues Lezlie Frye and Liz Loeb for this analysis.
35. Chris Claremont and Barry Windsor-Smith, *X-Men* 198 (October 1985), 12.
36. When the child has breathing difficulties at birth, Ororo wonders, “Was I in time—did I do the right thing—will the child grow up healthy and whole?” The possibility that these complications incurred brain damage raises the specter of securing a desirable, able-bodied existence for the child as the objective of the delivery, an ideal that pervades “LifeDeath” and other *X-Men* stories. Claremont and Windsor-Smith, *X-Men* 198, 18.
37. Ibid., 20.
38. Chris Claremont et al., *New Mutants* 32 (October 1985).
39. Claremont and Windsor-Smith, *X-Men* 198, 23.
40. Sanderson, “Perfect Storm,” 70.

4. Controversy and Crossover in Milestone Media’s *Icon*

1. Dwayne McDuffie et al., *Icon* 27 (July 1995).
2. See, e.g., David Brackett, “R&B in the 1980s: To Cross Over or Not to Cross Over?,” in *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*, 361–70 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Phillip Brian Harper, “Synesthesia, ‘Crossover,’ and Blacks in Popular Music,” *Social Text* 8, no. 2 (1989): 102–21.
3. The roots of connections between fanzines, pulp magazines, and superhero comics are deep. Julius Schwartz had published *Fantasy* with a cover price of 10 cents in the 1930s. The publication continued *Science Fiction Digest* and absorbed the contemporaneous magazine *The Time Traveller*. Weisinger had taken Schwartz’s place as editor of *Fantasy* in 1935. *Fantasy* used the abbreviation “stf,” short for Hugo Gernsback’s clunky portmanteau “scientifiction,” though it also made frequent use of the words “science fiction” and coined the term “scientificfilm” for reviews of motion pictures in the genre. Decades later, these editors brought the tradition of letters columns, a convention from the earliest days of pulp magazines and fanzines, into common usage in superhero comics. Mortimer Weisinger, *Fantasy Magazine* 32 (1935), http://fanac.org/fanzines/Fantasy_Magazine/Fantasy_Magazine_32-00.html.

4. Matthew Pustz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 44.
5. For more details about the process of publishing and distributing comic books, see Scott McCloud, *Reinventing Comics* (New York: Paradox Press, 2000).
6. "Iconography," *Icon* 2 (June 1993).
7. Though it now appears retrograde, Milestone's activity on the GENie telecommunications network was an early foray into online marketing for the comics industry, capitalizing on avid involvement in the burgeoning Internet culture of the 1990s among SF fans. Once GENie introduced a discussion group for comics fandom, members of Milestone's staff were among the frequent visitors. In this they accompanied early adopters in the SF writers' community, including genre innovator J. Michael Straczynski, who discussed his TV series *Babylon 5* frequently on GENie; Damon Knight, founder of the Science Fiction Writers of America, the organization that bestows Nebula awards to SF writers; and latter-day cyberpunk Cory Doctorow, who is now a prolific blogger.
8. The strategy of using letters pages as an in-house marketing venue was nothing new to the industry, as Matthew Pustz recounts in his *Comic Book Culture*. The subtitle of his book, *Fanboys and True Believers*, draws its name from the moniker with which Marvel Comics's longtime editor in chief invoked the company's fans ("Greetings, True Believers!"), and a chapter of the study refers to the "Marvel Zombies," an epithet that the company itself deployed to pooh-pooh reports of the damage mass media could do to youth. Recently, in Marvel Comics, the Black Panther and Storm battled the Marvel Zombies, an army of literally undead monsters fashioned after Marvel superheroes and named in a tongue-in-cheek reference to the company's erstwhile devotees.
9. Philip Gutis, "Turning Superheroes into Super Sales," *New York Times*, January 6, 1985, F6.
10. Jeffrey Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 194.
11. *Ibid.*, 197–98.
12. "Iconography," *Icon* 1 (May 1993).
13. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 9 (January 1994).
14. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 3 (July 1993).
15. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 4 (August 1993).
16. Tony Norman, "Milestone: This Is a Beginning, Not a Fad," *The Comics Journal*, no. 160 (1993): 67–77.
17. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 7 (November 1993).
18. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 10 (February 1994).
19. Norman, "Milestone."
20. Madhu Dubey, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7–8.
21. "Iconoclasts," *Icon* 9.
22. Dubey, *Signs and Cities*, 6.
23. Dwayne McDuffie et al., *Icon* 8 (December 1993).

24. Dwayne McDuffie et al., *Icon* 1.
25. "The Company Line," *Icon* 9.
26. "The Company Line," *Icon* 16 (August 1994).
27. Dwayne McDuffie et al., *Icon* 31 (November 1995).

5. The Golden Ghetto and the Glittering Parentheses

1. Terry Erdmann and Paula Block, "Emissary," in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 9.
2. Daniel Bernardi, *Star Trek and History: Race-ing toward a White Future* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 7–25.
3. In the original series, Spock struggles to reconcile his human and Vulcan tendencies: the season 2 episode "Journey to Babel" reveals that Spock opted out of membership in a traditional Vulcan science society to travel through space with humans in Starfleet, and in "The Savage Curtain," a Vulcan philosopher chides Spock for displaying human emotions instead of Vulcan logic. "Journey to Babel" and episodes of *The Next Generation* feature actors portraying Spock's human mother and Vulcan father, which reminds viewers about his mixed heritage. The 2009 film version of *Star Trek* also features an abbreviated coming-of-age narrative for Spock that places his dual nature as the formative problem of his childhood. See "Journey to Babel," *Star Trek: The Original Series—The Complete Second Season*, season 2, episode 39, directed by D. C. Fontana, aired November 17, 1967 (Los Angeles, Calif.: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD, and "The Savage Curtain," *Star Trek: The Original Series—The Complete Third Season*, season 3, episode 22, directed by Herschel Daugherty, aired March 7, 1969 (Los Angeles, Calif.: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD; also *Star Trek*, directed by J. J. Abrams (Los Angeles, Calif.: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD. For scientific, cultural, and historical perspectives on the treatment of mixed racial heritage, see Jayne Ifekwunigwe, ed., *"Mixed Race" Studies: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
4. The buddy comedy has long been a fixture in U.S. cinematic mediations of race relations, with prime examples of the genre including Mel Gibson and Danny Glover's *Lethal Weapon* films. See Christopher Ames, "Restoring the Black Man's Lethal Weapon: Race and Sexuality in Contemporary Cop Films," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 20, no. 3 (1992): 52–60; Philippa Gates, "Always a Partner in Crime: Black Masculinity in the Hollywood Detective Film," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 1 (2004): 20–29; and Davi Johnson Thornton, "Psych's Comedic Tale of Black–White Friendship and the Lighthearted Affect of 'Post-Race' America," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28, no. 5 (2011): 424–49. With respect to the captivity narrative, Susan Faludi's post-9/11 book *The Terror Dream* revisits this familiar story as an outgrowth of settler colonialism in North America and a reference point for contemporary national security rhetoric. Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).
5. In the course of the series, Sisko marries his new love interest, a civilian spaceship captain named Kasidy Yates. At one point, the two of them argue over the appeal

- of participating in a virtual-reality simulation of a nightclub on Earth. Sisko contends that because the simulation represents Las Vegas in the 1960s, it would have been segregated. Thus any enjoyment they derived from the experience would be inauthentic. He argues, "We can't ignore the truth about the past," to which Yates responds, "Going to Vic's isn't going to make us forget who we are or where we came from. What it does is remind us that we're no longer bound by any limitations . . . except the ones we impose on ourselves." See "Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang," *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine—The Complete Seventh Season*, season 7, episode 15, directed by Mike Vejar, aired February 24, 1999 (Los Angeles, Calif.: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD. See also Erdmann and Block, *Star Trek Deep Space Nine Companion*.
6. Houston Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 3.
 7. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xiv.
 8. *Ibid.*, 9.
 9. *Ibid.*, 8.
 10. Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 26.
 11. Michael Ashley, *The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the Beginning to 1950* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 150.
 12. Erdmann and Block, "Far beyond the Stars," in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion*, 533. A contradictory mock-up in the *Deep Space Nine Companion* identifies Rossoff as the author of "Quantity of the Monster," referring to a story title used by Fritz Leiber in 1958 and Robert Heinlein in 1979 ("Number of the Beast"), but never by Ellison. See *Internet Speculative Fiction Database*, s.v. "Number of the Beast," <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?56305>.
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 17. *Ibid.*
 18. Other works in this vein include Jonathan Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), which explores Black social scientists' work to express the relevance of their work within intellectual institutions that have viewed race consciousness on the part of Black thinkers as a constraint rather than a source of insight into systemic issues.
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21. Steven Barnes, author's note to *Far beyond the Stars* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 270.
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25. *Ibid.*, 31.
26. Sandra Grayson, *Visions of the Third Millennium: Black Science Fiction Novelists Write the Future* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2003), 93.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Sarah Cardwell, "Adaptation Studies Revisited: Purposes, Perspectives, and Inspiration," in *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, ed. James Welsh and Peter Lev (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 51.
29. Grayson, *Visions of the Third Millennium*, 93.
30. Barnes, *Far beyond the Stars*, 4.
31. *Ibid.*, 264.
32. Sharon DeGraw, "Burroughs," in *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction*, 1–52 (New York: Routledge, 2007).
33. A lengthy overview of Deane's compelling argument is beyond the scope of my discussion here, but his work initiates a generative conversation between contemporary postcolonial theory and the colonial discourse, including popular fiction, that provides a point of departure for some of its arguments. For further elaboration on the concepts relevant to the notion of imperial barbarism and primitive masculinity, particularly in the context of the African diaspora, see Bradley Deane, "Imperial Barbarians: Primitive Masculinity in Lost World Fiction," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, no. 36 (2008): 205–25; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); and Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).
34. Greg Beatty, "Interview: Steven Barnes," *Strange Horizons*, July 29, 2002, <http://www.strangehorizons.com/2002/20020729/interview.shtml>.
35. Charles Saunders, "The Soul in the Sword," in *Griots: A Sword and Soul Anthology*, Kindle ed., ed. Charles Saunders and Milton Davis (Fayetteville, GA: MVMedia, 2011).
36. Alondra Nelson, "A Black Mass as Black Gothic: Myth and Bioscience in Black Cultural Nationalism," in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Collins and Margo Crawford, 137–53 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006).
37. Lorrie Smith, "Black Arts to Def Jam: Performing Black 'Spirit Work' across Generations," in Collins and Crawford, *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, 352.

38. Nabeel Zuberi, "Is This the Future? Black Music and Technology Discourse," *Science Fiction Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 286.
39. Kilgore, *Astrofuturism*, 131.
40. Beatty, "Interview: Steven Barnes." See also Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
41. Two coauthored novels by Barnes and Due in the zombie subgenre are rife for consideration in light of the allegorical paradigm that critics—particularly in cinema studies—have pointed out as a salient factor in the development of this theme. Steven Barnes and Tananarive Due, *Devil's Wake* (New York: Atria, 2012), and Tananarive Due and Steven Barnes, *Domino Falls* (New York: Atria, 2013).
42. Isiah Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 88.
43. Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), utilizes eclectic and unconventional sources of evidence to reconstruct the narrative of how enslaved Africans and their descendants from many distinct ethnic groups forged a relatively unified Black identity in the Americas. Dick's novel is one of the most exemplary works of "New Wave" speculative fiction from the 1960s. Its premise, rather than scientific innovation or a supernatural conceit, is a historical situation in which Nazi Germany survived the Second World War. Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1962).
44. Barnes, *Far beyond the Stars*, 4.
45. *Ibid.*, 55.
46. *Ibid.*, 56.
47. In the novel, the model on the desk is a model of the Trylon Tower built for the World's Fair. In the television episode, however, the central object on the desk is a model rocket ship. The time lag between writing the teleplay, commissioning the adaptation, and setting the scene for the cameras with physical objects provides for this telling discrepancy between evocative historical objects in the print and visual forms of the episode. Barnes's touchstone hearkens back to a historical moment prior to the setting of the majority of the story, while the object used on the shooting set was a later consideration. See Erdmann and Block, "Far beyond the Stars."
48. Barnes, *Far beyond the Stars*, 58.
49. *Ibid.*, 59.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 74.
52. Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*.
53. Barnes, *Far beyond the Stars*, 78.
54. *Ibid.*, 174.
55. *Ibid.*, 81–82, emphasis original.
56. *Ibid.*, 96, emphasis original.

57. Ibid., 201–2.
58. Ibid., 119.
59. Ira Steven Behr and Hans Beimler, “Far beyond the Stars,” script, in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion: A Series Guide and Script Library* (New York: Simon and Schuster Interactive, 1999), CD-ROM, 37.
60. Barnes, *Far beyond the Stars*, 119.
61. Ibid., 217–35.
62. Ibid., 217, emphasis original.

6. Dreaming in Color

1. I use this phrase after its coinage in Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1990): 1–24. My uses of terms that originate in Appadurai’s essay, such as “flow” and various metaphors for the technological and media “landscape,” are informed by the thoughtful reconsiderations of that watershed piece represented in responses such as Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell, “The Anthropology of Global Flows: A Critical Reading of Arjun Appadurai’s ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,’” *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 2 (2009): 131–48, and the work of Daya Kishan Thussu, e.g., *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
2. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, introduction to *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xii.
3. Ibid.
4. Alicia Headlam Hines, Alondra Nelson, and Thuy Linh Tu, “Introduction: Hidden Circuits,” in *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*, ed. Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh Tu, and Alicia Headlam Hines (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1.
5. Kara Keeling, “‘Joining the Lesbians’: Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 215.
6. Anna Everett, *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 37.
7. Te, “The Remember Us Manifesto, Version 1.0,” Remember Us, <http://dreaming-in-color.net/manifesto.html>.
8. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 154.
9. Ibid.
10. Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman, eds., *Race in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.
11. Bury’s study highlights the capacity of everyday feminist interpretive practices to reclaim spaces such as the home and cyberspace, which she calls “the virtual kitchen,” as generative heterotopias where, in her most elegant formulation “active consent to normative practices is suspended.” Representing cyberspace such as the “kitchen” is problematic, however, because people of color have experienced a

- vexed relationship to the meanings of domesticity produced in that space. Though White women have sought refuge in domestic space in ways that disrupt the private–public binary, domestic workers have labored to make their private leisure possible, and the public kitchen is also a work site where the labor of people of color is disproportionately feminized and ghettoized. Rhiannon Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 17.
12. Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own*, 166.
 13. Penley and Ross, *Technoculture*, xv.
 14. Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own*, 207.
 15. *Ibid.*, 186.
 16. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 95.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own*, 181.
 19. *Ibid.*, 183.
 20. Te, “Submission Guidelines,” Remember Us, <http://dreaming-in-color.net/subguide.html>.
 21. Alison, “The Americanisation of British Fandoms,” The Fanfic Symposium, <http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp157.html>.
 22. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 46.
 23. Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own*, 17.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. Dylan Gleason, “Why People Tend Not to Favor Minor Characters,” The Fanfic Symposium, <http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp192.htm>.
 26. Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 125.
 27. Here Gopinath writes about the U.S. critical reception of the song and dance sequence that characterizes Bollywood films such as the one on which *Monsoon Wedding* was based, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. Whereas she reads song and dance sequences in Bollywood as utopian moments of queer possibility for women and male characters alike, she sees the queer possibility of a wedding party for women in *Monsoon Wedding* translated and thus contained within a young gay male character's vicarious identification with the women: “The result of this translation from the homoerotics of homosocial spaces and the queer spectacle of the song and dance sequence of Bollywood film to the queer-coded supporting character of Hollywood convention is that the film aggressively equates queerness with male masculinity, and equates femininity with normative heterosexuality.” Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 125.
 28. Gopinath and Jasbir Puar articulate thoughtful critiques of the ways in which contemporary discourses of nationalism and gay liberation conflate liberal forms of sexual identification in metropolitan locations with modernity through the marginalization of former colonial sites and tourist destinations in the Third World. By assuming that sexuality is less “liberated” in the Global South, we assume that all societies must move toward hetero- and homosexual modernity, rendering non-heteronormative Third World desires impossible, but “queering” the movements

- between First and Third World, such as tourism, diaspora, and globalization, in the process. See Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, and Puar, "Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization," *GLQ* 8, no. 1–2 (2002): 101–37.
29. Fyre, "The Chosen One," The Wayback Machine, <http://web.archive.org/web/20091027134435/http://www.geocities.com/fyredansa/buffyfiction/chosen.html>.
 30. Kate Bolin, "Little Blue Bottles," The Pearl, <http://www.dymphna.net/fanfic/littlebluebottles.html>.
 31. Jayne Leitch, "Home Fires," Remember Us, <http://www.dreaming-in-color.net/stories/bufhomefires.htm>.
 32. Puar's "Circuits of Queer Mobility" offers the suggestion that volitional movements such as tourism differentiate the meanings of queer subjectivity in a global context. Rather than ruling out the identification of contemporary gay and lesbian identity with social mobility, Puar argues that critics need to acknowledge the privilege through which gay and lesbian advocates claim to find community and identify against heterosexism across the globe. Olivia's reference to her "large family inheritance" places her in this circuit, complicating the notion that diaspora is a necessarily marginal social formation. In my view, Olivia provides a compelling example of the way in which queer diaspora might be an unwieldy formation where lines of privilege and disadvantage are as unclear and arbitrary as the distinctions gay and lesbian advocates make between liberated, tolerant modern societies and unenlightened, Third World locations.
 33. Lindamarie, "Home," The Wayback Machine, <http://web.archive.org/web/20040428134913/www.panavatar.net/luminescent/fanfiction/home.htm>.
 34. Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 255.
 35. *Ibid.*, 256.
 36. *Ibid.*, 272.
 37. dangerous_angel, "Change (in the House of Flies)," *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Part 1, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/luckybrans/26057.html>.
 38. dangerous_angel, "Silver and Cold," *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Part 2, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/luckybrans/26792.html>.
 39. dangerous_angel, "Butterflies and Hurricanes," *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Part 3, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/luckybrans/26884.html>.
 40. See the work of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Angela Davis on this topic, in particular.
 41. dangerous_angel, "Silver and Cold."
 42. dangerous_angel, "Release," *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Part 5, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/luckybrans/28620.html>.
 43. dangerous_angel, "Grab Thy Hand," *The Broken Wall, the Burning Roof and Tower*, Part 6, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/luckybrans/28786.html>.
 44. Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.

Coda

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2. Delany, "The *Para•doxa* Interview," 205.
3. Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, "On the Origin of Species: Mary Shelley," in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, ed. James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, 163–204 (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2005); Marlene Barr, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 219–20.
4. Kali Tal, "That Just Kills Me: Black Militant Near-Future Fiction," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 66.

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