

Speculative Fiction as a Weapon of Intellectual Warfare:
The Battle to Imagine a Racist or an Anti-Racist Future

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Riddled with wars, racism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy, our world could be perceived to be on an inevitable track toward further destruction and chaos. The realm of popular culture and specifically the genre of speculative fiction holds a unique power of being able to escape such chaos in a theoretical space and imagine preferable alternatives for the future. The medium has the capability to envision the future as a means to provide insight into our present. So, with realities of systemic racism permeating throughout the United States, there seems to be a pressing need for speculative fiction to engage with anti-racist discourses, to stimulate insight into the path that we seem to be stuck on. To avoid realities of racism in speculative fiction is to avoid our current reality — and is also to avoid a complete and accurate speculation of what the future may hold. Furthermore, if racialized and colonial thinking is not deconstructed and reimagined through speculative fiction, readers become susceptible to blindly or subconsciously accepting that the imagined future can only be determined by the racial frameworks of the past. The goal, however, is to provide a space where exploration of the future incorporates tangible anti-racist theories – which would provide readers with the opportunity to imagine that, maybe, a better future could exist, or come close to existing.

Speculative fiction has the ability to perpetuate the problematic thinking of our current world that has resulted in frequent tragedies for victims of racial warfare. In order to counter this incessant warfare, speculative fiction as a genre should be considered as a weapon of war that, if not used correctly, will contribute to the already existing racial battles. If this weapon is used correctly, an intellectual revolution can be sparked — one that can raze the prevailing oppressive systems. While racism, in my view, will inevitably determine the future due to its deeply entrenched ubiquity, speculative fiction creators can envision a future that recognizes such racism and provides a future that edges toward counteracting some or many of the problems.

Once recognizing the power speculative fiction holds as a medium that can promote or dismantle dominant racialized thought practices, speculative fiction creators must note that there has been a historical resistance – according to certain anti-racist scholars and authors – toward incorporating anti-racist authors as significant contributors to the genre, much like the greater United States has resisted engagement with anti-racist activists. Authors should study primary and classic examples of some of the genre’s plots, character arcs, themes, and stories that perpetuate racial and colonial thinking, in order to understand some of the problems. Specifically, they must analyze narrative devices of notable texts within genre that mask true realities of white supremacy and colonialism, such as the speculative fiction trope which depicts a prominence of white victimhood that conceals oppressed experiences of communities of color. One must also examine ideal examples of anti-racist speculative fiction, as indicative of the possibilities for what the genre could further encourage and elaborate upon. Creators who have preserved racial logics have held much power within the publishing world and should redirect focus toward the goal of preventing a continuation of racist thought within speculative fiction. This also especially applies to aspiring white creators like myself who risk involuntarily perpetuating racialized logics. Ideally, creators would strive toward explicitly tackling these problematic narratives and ways of thinking within the work itself.

I will pay particular attention to texts written by prominent authors such as H.G. Wells, Orson Scott Card, and Ray Bradbury as indicative of incomplete or problematic examples of racial and colonial thinking. I will turn to authors such as Samuel Delany, André M. Carrington, Octavia Butler, W.E.B. Du Bois, N.K. Jemison, and Ursula Le Guin — among others — as praiseworthy examples of anti-racist speculative fiction or speculative fiction scholarship that is consistent with the post-civil rights constructions of race in the United States. To understand the

power of private and public entities perpetuating racialized thinking that can enter into public consciousness, I will begin by analyzing a quote from Inderpal Grewal's essay "Security Moms".

"While the relationship between empire and domestic ideologies has a long history in the United States, showing indeed that public and private were integrated and often interconnected, neoliberalism emphasizes the fluidity between the two realms, rather than the decline of the state or the triumph of the private realm."ⁱ

Grewal explores the interconnection between the private and public realms in the United States, which have both constructed dominant understandings of what security looks like in the United States. The "security mom" exemplifies what this security looks like —where individuals craving this "security" perpetuate capitalism, anti-terrorist sentiment, and patriotism, as well as support the idea that certain communities (primarily communities of color) are blameworthy and should be feared and/or excluded. In the United States, the existence of wars such as the war on crime is made possible partially because of the integration of the public and private understandings of what "danger" is. The war on crime, targeting communities of color, is justified because the goal becomes security, rather than outward racial segregation. In the quest for security, white individuals may focus on scapegoating certain communities to solve problems rather than on analyzing the consequences of living in and preserving a white supremacist, militarized, and racialized nation. Because racialized thinking has been coded and normalized through private companies and governmental rhetoric, people possessing racialized thought-methods may not even realize that their beliefs are racist. "Safety" and "security" will always have implicit racial undertones — an example of which would be in the policing of shopping malls in wealthy, white suburban neighborhoods aimed to exclude people of color suspected to be criminals or interrupters of the "safe" way of life. While on the surface white individuals may see policing of shopping malls as crucial for a secure and crime-free environment, this policing continuously directs focus and force at individuals of color who have been framed as outsiders. Speculative

fiction risks perpetuating these racialized thought-processes in the public conscious and subconscious, just as the state and private rhetoric of the need for security has been ingrained in the “security mom’s” mentality. Speculative fiction must be treated as weapon of intellectual warfare because a perpetuation of these problematic ways of thinking within the genre can allow readers to continue believing and acting upon thought processes similar to those held by security moms that manifests as *actual* violence and exclusion in everyday life for victims of racial subjugation.

In order to prevent the conservation of this racialized thinking in the speculative fiction genre, one must remain aware of the power speculative fiction holds and why anti-racism matters for these texts. In *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction*, André M. Carrington addresses the influence of speculative fiction as a medium that can shape public understandings and has the ability to mimic problematic white-supremacist values possessed by the United States. On a most basic level, Carrington understands that “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.”ⁱⁱ It seems perplexing that racism would not be tangibly addressed within the body of this mainstream genre, particularly because of the power it holds as a medium to explore nuanced and important issues that the public will engage with. This can go two ways, however. The public can either engage with anti-racist messages or racist messages, and the job of the speculative fiction creator is to invite in the public who have different opinions and political beliefs and understand that they can introduce meaningful anti-racist messages. Carrington understands “how the ideologies on display in popular texts resonate with the public,”ⁱⁱⁱ so the fact that racism would not be tangibly addressed within speculative fiction would dangerously contribute to the already far-reaching

racialized logics that predominate the public cognizance. While every piece of popular culture cannot and should not attempt to engage with an entire society – as there are many different readers with different backgrounds – there should be more accessible engagement with race and racism within powerful genres because of how prominently those messages may be regarded by the public. It is because of the medium’s prominence that one must regard the genre as possessing the power to perpetuate an intellectual, racialized war that mimics realities of racial oppression in the United States. Those with power within a system have the ability to perpetuate or dismantle racial problems that prevail that system, and speculative fiction – in this case – can be explicitly compared to an entity possessing immense power. Carrington explores the mirroring of science fiction, or speculative fiction, to the greater habits and norms of a white supremacist United States. He says, “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.”^{iv} The alienation of the black community has been a consistent United States tendency since slavery, when black individuals were excluded from the larger benefits of white society and were only eventually invited in, arguably, for the white supremacist state to benefit in new, seemingly more "acceptable" ways. This relates to speculative fiction because the genre has been dominated, much like the political leaders of the United States that have promoted slavery or mass incarceration of black individuals, by white authors and publishers. And while not every white author of the genre wishes to exclude or is fearful of authors of color, similar to how not every white leader in a white supremacist state would wish to exclude people of color, there is a clear, prevalent resistance to the inclusion of “other” authors. An important point for Carrington is that “the effort to bring together race-conscious cultural criticism and the study of speculative fiction is not a new endeavor.”^v This pursuit of anti-racist content has been ongoing

and should continue to exist so long as the issues of racism are still active in the world. However, obstacles have been placed upon authors who have made it a point to engage with anti-racist messages – such authors have been silenced, excluded, or made less significant than their white counterparts who may not confront racism within their work. This exclusion has prevented anti-racist authors and stories from achieving mass popularity and acceptance. These occurrences can be analogized to anti-racist activists in the United States who have been barred from mainstream conversations. Anti-racist authors of speculative fiction can be seen as a microcosm of the larger white supremacist society – and thus mainstream speculative fiction publishing in the United States can be seen as continuing the racial war targeted at anti-racist activists.

One such author who has experienced marginalization is Samuel Delany, a prominent African American science fiction writer who emerged in the 1960s. Delany discusses exclusion and its relevance to the larger society in his essay “Racism and Science Fiction”:

“As long as there are only one, two, or a handful of us, however, I presume in a field such as science fiction, where many of its writers come out of the liberal-Jewish tradition, prejudice will most likely remain a slight force—until, say, black writers start to number thirteen, fifteen, twenty percent of the total. At that point, where the competition might be perceived as having some economic heft, chances are we will have as much racism and prejudice here as in any other field.”^{vi}

Delany understands the value of the black experience in science fiction, as a way to counter the dominant, white-centric viewpoints. He also understands that speculative fiction suffers from racism that is not isolated from but comparable to other entities, such as in other artistic genres or fields. Carrington agrees that white supremacy and racism prevails the medium when he claims that “the whiteness of science fiction names both the overrepresentation of white people among the rank of SF authors and the overrepresentation of White people’s experiences with SF texts.”^{vii} The publishing world has silenced authors of color and has perpetuated white-supremacist values through the type of work that the genre has encouraged to be written and

published. Delany shares an experience of how publishers would frame this silencing of his content by claiming that audiences were “not able to relate to [a] black main character.”^{viii} This statement masks itself as having the audience’s best interest at heart, yet it further indicates a white dominant field, both in character and audience, and refuses to incorporate new perspectives into this space which craves more diversity. Delany experienced further racism when he won his first science fiction award, when the presenter of his award prefaced the acceptance speech by hinting that Delany’s work was “pretentious literary nonsense.”^{ix} When Delany accepted his award, he said “I received a standing ovation—though I was aware it was as much in reaction to the upbraiding of the nay-sayer as it was in support of anything I had done.”^x Delany was not praised for his work, per se, but praised instead for his presence in the room as a singular black male — the audience overcompensating their cheering because they knew that if they applauded, they would counter racism. Yet this is not true inclusion: inclusion must incorporate more than just one or a handful of anti-racist authors of color. Inclusion indicates a simultaneous commitment to much more diversity of authors within the publishing pool as well as a supporting of anti-racist concepts displayed through the content itself.

Resistance from this white-dominant field extends beyond the publishing space and can be seen through prevalent examples of the types of stories written in the genre mainly by white authors. In his chapter “The Remaking of Zero: Beginning at the End,” Gary K. Wolfe mentions fairly early on that dystopia or disaster has occurred often in human history, such as in the occurrence of the Nazi holocaust or through the massacre of millions of native Americans in the United States.^{xi} If the world has ended so many times, shouldn’t it make sense that when the world ends in these narratives, these disasters could look similar to or be a product of the worlds ends in the past? Wolfe indicates the pervasiveness of white-centric stories in mainstream plot

lines of speculative fiction – which distorts the realities of racism and mimics problematic thinking that resists addressing the racialized suffering of communities of color and instead avoids confronting race altogether. Two common themes widely existing in speculative fiction, according to Wolfe, is the impact of technology on human behavior and humanity’s relationship to its environment: be it natural, animal, or psychological. There is a typical “re-emergence of chaos”^{xiii} for the surviving characters, who must battle this chaos in order to survive. Yet, in these common tropes, we do not see a disassembling of race or explicit colonialism. Instead, we see white characters struggling — without acknowledgment from authors that there are probably reasons why many of the characters surviving are white. Maybe because a white supremacist society would make it easier for white and privileged individuals to survive before characters of color would? Additionally, we see a fixation on natural or inevitable environmental or human chaos, rather than pandemonium that might have ensued from meticulously and consciously orchestrated racial discriminations – a practice that the United States has historically participated in. We see white characters battling technology, natural disasters, or their own psychology — yet these narratives can be seen as whitewashed and inaccurate. People of color have historically battled technology and environmental chaos at much higher rates than privileged white individuals. Yet when the world ends in these particular narratives, there is little indication that these realities ever existed for characters of color. There’s no contemplation of how these disasters that white individuals face in the narratives are comparable to the disasters that have consistently occurred for communities of color in real life. And rarely, it seems, are there characters of color facing these realities – maybe because there seems to be an assumption that all characters of color have died or do not belong in the story somehow. This would be preposterous because the progression of our current society would more realistically have

characters of color suffer greater consequences of the end of the world than a white character would.

There are key, specific texts that explicitly perpetuate common racialized thinking. In “The Highway,” for example, Ray Bradbury discusses the dichotomy between a poor Mexican farmer and the white civilization escaping a nuclear holocaust around them. Bradbury depicts the farmer as a man who has supposedly never known anything beyond his simple farm life. The farmer is confronted by a damaged civilian car holding white individuals who inform him about the apparent end of the world. The farmer then asks, “what do they mean, ‘the world’”^{xiii} as if he knows nothing beyond his own situation and setting. This perpetuates a problematic stereotype of ignorance and extreme poverty of Mexican-Americans. What remains absent is the recognition of the racism beyond the situation that may have forced the farmer to live and work in this underprivileged environment for hideously low wages, like many desperate Mexican immigrants have been forced to. Where is the recognition of the possibility that even poor Mexican farm workers can understand realities beyond their physical situation — that just because someone may be poor and of low class, they could be conscious of the greater world? The author here preserves common racially motivated thinking without admitting to it for his audiences to reflect upon. Because of this, the text has perpetuated a subliminal and problematic stereotypical message about poor Mexican-Americans, and thus continues the ongoing logics that preserve racialized wars in the United States.

Even in a case where racism and colonialism are explicitly addressed, such as in the classic novel, *The War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells does not go far enough to counteract or deliberate on the colonialism that prevails in the novel. Wells unambiguously draws a parallel between an alien invasion and European colonization in his introduction, which would be a great

start if Wells had continued to ponder the racial and colonial overtones in the remainder of the narrative itself. Wells begins the novel with this explicit analogy to European colonization of Tasmania:

“And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years.”^{xiv}

This is the only instance of direct pondering of colonialism. Wells does not go far enough throughout the novel in engaging with anti-colonial sentiment, and he also perpetuates colonial logics by depicting the Tasmanians as an “inferior race” without recognizing who was determining their inferiority. In the narrative, white civilians become the victims of colonialism and the true victims excluded from the story. The idea may be to appeal to white audiences who would otherwise never experience such disasters, in order to spark empathy and realization of how colonialism has affected other communities. But this does not seem to be the case in the novel, as the characters themselves never really ponder how European colonialism has affected communities of color. Couldn't many of the characters, like the narrator briefly does in his opening remarks, have grappled more with the result of European colonialism in manufacturing countless deaths of communities of color – just as the Martians have annihilated members of their own, white communities? Couldn't the narrator have pondered more on the colonialism throughout the novel even if the other characters do not? Couldn't the author have had actual individuals of color realizing the irony of a Martian invasion victimizing a colonial society that has used comparable tactics of violent conquest? Instead, the narrative depicts its white characters as victims without their recognition of the racialized past – even though the author is aware of such atrocities.

In the narrative, the British army attempts to fight the Martians, but the results are futile as the Martians have much sturdier artillery and can destroy the human military with ease. It is seemingly less of a “war” and more of an extermination, similar to a human destroying rodents that infest a house, or colonizers obliterating cultures deemed as “subordinate” and powerless. The issue with the combat in the narrative is not in the punishment of the historically colonial British army that positions this army as sympathetic, but in the fact that this combating does not amount to a recognition of what it might be like to be a colonized community pitted against impossible odds. The lack of calling attention to such histories results in Wells not utilizing the full potential of his prospective social message. Additionally, the protagonists, whom we are meant to follow and sympathize with, do not feel remorse for atrocities that their civilization has committed throughout time. Having the characters reflect on what went wrong throughout history – and possibly feeling guilt or remorse — would extend to audiences. With *The War of the Worlds*’ narrative conclusion, additionally, the message falls short. The Martians die from a bacteria that all humans are immune to, allowing an escape for audiences who could then focus on the universalism of humanity, rather than individual complicity. The invasion of earth, supposedly, implies that the differences between people on earth are petty, irrelevant, and should be easily overlooked in favor of commonalities. The message seemingly becomes that all humans can simply forget their differences and praise their similarities because we could all be destroyed at any moment. The issue with this is that in all likelihood, we will not be completely destroyed at any moment – because of this, we need to work for a future where our differences can be moved past. As of now, and certainly when *The War of the Worlds* was written, simply forgetting human differences would not result in improvement but further ignorance and propagation of deeply ingrained racial issues. We must earn a future of anti-racism through hard

work and anti-racist theoretical thinking. Wells, through his writing, does not earn the right to depict a future where we can simply forget our differences.

There seems a prevalence of a white-centric mentality in some speculative fiction narratives— where white struggles become prevalent over battling the forms of white supremacy that have resulted in the victimization of other communities throughout modern history. In cases such as in *Ender's Game*, Orson Scott Card “use[s] the invasion of the superior aliens not as a critique of Western expansion and genocide, but as an excuse for those things.”^{xv} This justification of imperialism and expansionism lends to the idea of the white person’s burden. If white people can colonize to “save” another “lost” society, then it is the white person’s burden to do so. There is an underlying mentality of white victimhood or suffering that depicts white saviors as necessary, while what is really necessary is a countering of this mindset.

With texts that take it upon themselves to confront evilness and racism, explicitness should not be discouraged and readers should be able to be held accountable. While authors must have the freedom to depict characters however they like, there is still an issue with leaving characters’ actions too ambiguous and unexplored for audiences. In texts such as *The Purple Cloud*, “much of what is so threatening about these evil figures [in this narrative] lies in the recognition on the part of the reader — and usually on the part of the protagonist as well — of how much they have in common with us.”^{xvi} This provides too much freedom for the reader to interpret this “evilness” as a broad-sweeping and potentially inaccurate account of “human nature”. This trope avoids the idea that evilness may be a product of particular oppressive systems that have allowed certain privileged individuals to hold particular viewpoints and not, as this text might suggest, because certain evils are inevitabilities for certain humans.

Neel Ahuja explores the danger of depicting disasters as results of human nature or inevitabilities in his essay, “Posthuman New York: Ground Zero of the Anthropocene.” Ahuja argues that “speculations of climate-driven extinction in contemporary literature and visual culture operate as postcolonial fantasies of a universal human precarity.”^{xvii} This idea, similar to the precarity of human existence at the conclusion of *The War of the Worlds*, spreads the problematic notion that we should simply forget about our differences because the world will eventually end. Furthermore, it hints at the idea that all humans suffer equally, which is historically untrue – certain communities are more susceptible to experiencing negative effects from climate change disasters. The world today is riddled with issues, and people crave tangible and realistic solutions — it’s not realistic for a society to simply forget the issues. The issues are ingrained in the public consciousness and unless actively counteracted, will continue to operate in the public conscious and subconscious and affect lives. This is prevalent in the “colorblind” mentality in the United States. The idea that one doesn’t see color is an impossibility in the United States — as racism operates implicitly as much as it does explicitly. It is not believable that a white individual seeing a black individual would not recognize that individual as black, and not have thoughts about the person’s race. Good intentions from white individuals or systems can often work to the detriment of the very communities that they are aiming to help — such as modern missionary projects in countries in the global south where white saviors may claim that they are not racist, but in actuality their activities perpetuate racialized thinking and subjugated realities for the communities in the global south. Ahuja further states, when referencing Arun Saldanha, that “The Anthropocene is in itself a racist biopolitical reality.”^{xviii} Because we currently live in an era where human domination prevails over environmental domination, I argue it would be more beneficial and accurate to create speculative fiction plots

that revolve around human-oriented chaos such as racism rather than the inevitable chaos of nature. The Anthropocene has proven humanity's tremendous influence on its environment through corrupt, human practices, so the fact that texts can instead focus on environmental inevitabilities erases the racism and immorality behind much of this environmental chaos.

He calls attention to the specific work of *Manifest Destiny* which envisions a New York City 3,000 years into the future, with rising sea levels and a stark depiction of the take-over of wilderness. Although a mural and not a narrative text, this depiction of a far-off future risks, as Ahuja says, overshadowing colonial, sociopolitical, economic, and racialized realities that would have contributed to the demise of New York. And while “seductive” to imagine a future so distant and far off, by doing so the author avoids engaging with the constructions and creations that set into motion this particular end of the world. A fixation on human precarity because of the inevitable take-over of wilderness perpetuates the notion that humanity's problematic actions do not matter – when, in reality, these actions still *do* matter for audiences that would view such texts that depict far-off futures. Additionally, a depiction of a world so far into the future where human experience has been erased does not acknowledge that the lands depicted in this future have links to indigenous populations – whose land has been stolen. In *Manifest Destiny*, there seems a perpetuation of the idea that land is land and cannot be owned or controlled by a specific group of people, yet this is the very logic that initially motivated settler-colonial invaders to claim their territory on lands that *did*, in fact, have ties to other communities and was not open for conquering. In theory, land could be open to anyone. But because the world has progressed in a way where land struggles do exist, it seems to be an irresponsible excuse for any author to pretend that land should be open to all. There should instead be grappling with the reality that land is not open to all and certain lands should belong to certain indigenous communities.

There are debates about how and when race and racism have emerged historically, indicating that racism is not an innate quality of human nature. With this logic, one might consider that race and racism could be “solved”. Yet, in a world today where race and racism pervade and has yet to be deconstructed, it’s difficult to imagine this ideal future where people are no longer racist. This future has to be earned, and this is the unique place of speculative fiction authors. They can earn a future of less racism because they have the ability to work through the problems of racism in their narratives. We can look to prime examples of how an author achieves anti-racism through their work by analyzing select anti-racist texts and scholars of anti-racist texts. Realizing that there has been an exclusion of anti-racist speculative fiction authors and content within a white dominant genre, we should lift up these texts and set them as examples for how to continue combating racism through speculative fiction. Speculative fiction, while having the potential to mimic and perpetuate problematic racial notions, also exists as a way *out* of the current trends and norms. One such tactic in imaging a way out is in the subgenre of Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism is a great example of how an author can explore the limitations of current society while also envision a new one without such restrictions. It first asks the question: “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?”^{xix} The answer is yes and white publishers, audiences, and creators who have excluded Afrofuturism from prevalence in mainstream speculative fiction circulation must afford space for Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism provides a place for black authors to counteract realities of racism and this must be praised and protected as an important weapon of the broader speculative fiction genre to continue combatting racism.

In his book *Race in American Science Fiction*, Isiah Lavender explores noteworthy examples of anti-racist speculative fiction that simultaneously address the current realities of racism while also imagine futures working through such problems. He speaks extensively on Octavia Butler, whose series *Xenogenesis*^{xx} unequivocally addresses the future as if a product of a racialized past. Lavender argues that “Butler’s story is of great consequence to readers because she explores the physiological and spiritual repercussions of racism on a disintegrating country that illustrate the importance of examining attitudes, assumptions, and feelings by which society has conditioned everyone.”^{xxi} Choosing to envision a future where religion survives based on embracing difference and chance serves as a direct response to those who use religion in order to segregate or subjugate based upon differences through senses of moral sureness. Butler does not avoid the problems and skip to a future that is unfamiliar: her future is based upon the problems of the past and new realities will have to be earned by confronting these problematic realities. She, furthermore, embraces systemic racism by mentioning this “conditioning” by the society at large. Butler, however, deliberately adheres to some common tropes of speculative fiction as a way to counteract problematic narrative tendencies in the genre. She uses technology and scientific advances as the only “plausible means” to potentially survive. She combines a criticism of race with the solution of using technology. She does not focus on the abstract ideas of whether technology itself is inherently good or evil like other speculative fiction texts might, but rather understands that technology can be used as a tool — either to perpetuate or counter racism. She doesn’t call for a total abandonment of the speculative fiction trope but rather promotes a reclaiming of this trope with an updated focus on anti-racism. Eventually, Butler decides in her series that the only way to escape “the coming race war” is to look to the stars, beyond earth. This suggests that when one deals with race in speculative fiction, there may be the realization

that the existence of a new community or beginning cannot exist in the world as it is currently composed. Whether a symbolic or literal suggestion, Butler's choice to have characters escape to the stars proves that she wants to address a new reality *not* based on racism. Her future acknowledges and grapples with the racism of everyday life and then decides that a new way must be created, that doesn't perpetuate racist tropes. She does not depict this escape to the stars as a way to avoid racism, nor does she suggest that an escape would solve the issues of racism, but she does focus her plot on attempting to instigate a new reality based upon anti-racist, educated intentions.

Other authors have countered racism through their work as well – such as Ursula Le Guin, W.E.B. Du Bois, and N.K. Jemison. Le Guin engages with problematic speculative fiction tropes in her essay, “American Science Fiction and the Other” when she states that the other often appears “as vast anonymous masses fleeing from giant slime-globules...or dying off by the billion from pollution or radiation, or as faceless armies being led to battle by generals and statesmen.”^{xxii} She then attempts to engage the other in her own narrative work to counter the propensity to group communities together, which diminishes the value of individual experiences just as it also belittles the nuanced ways in which racism operates in and against particular communities. There is a problematic speculative fiction tendency for Le Guin that “social change presented by most SF has been towards authoritarianism, the domination of ignorant masses by a powerful elite—sometimes presented as a warning, but often quite complacently.”^{xxiii} Le Guin recognizes the problematic tropes, and takes a careful, intentional, and effective step forward in contemplating how to grapple with and confront this in her own work. W.E.B. Du Bois, through his short story *The Comet*^{xxiv} depicts a black man and a white woman navigating a newly destroyed metropolitan city. In order to survive and preserve humanity, they must address their

differences. The story does not shy away from delving into the racism that prevails the white female character, through depicting her privilege and luxury and initial fear of the black man. Furthermore, Du Bois commits to a bold social message at the conclusion of the story when other survivors emerge and the black man and white woman do not resolve their differences. Thus, the story seems to indicate that true, anti-racist resolutions require more than confrontation between a singular black man and white woman. It takes a collective and a recognition of the systemic, and perhaps this will never happen because — in this text — it seems that only an apocalypse would force a white individual to try to overcome racial differences. Although a possible cynical message, Du Bois purposefully does not allow the reader off the hook – he instead forces them to engage with the disasters of racism and the idea that resolution of such issues will not be achieved easily.

N.K. Jemison confronts racism through her work as well, committing to portraying stories revolving around disempowered individuals. She states in an interview:

“I tend to write society as I see and understand it. My first series, the ‘Inheritance’ trilogy... [deals] with a woman of color from an impoverished culture, being brought up among wealthy, privileged white people and having to cope and perform in ways that she has not been raised to do, and that was obviously drawn from some personal experiences. I do that in everything — explorations of power, identity and belonging.”^{xxv}

Jemison centers her narrative on an impoverished woman of color raised by privileged white people in order to engage with racial realities and disparities, yet she refrains from tokenizing her characters. She grounds her text in her personal experience and commits to authenticity and credibility. She explores power, identity, and belonging – elements of tremendous importance for understanding race construction in the United States from both systemic and individualistic levels.

People of color have made up large portions of the United States population for a while, and authors of color, as well as white anti-racist authors, have existed as well. Jemisin agrees when she states that “people of color have always been here. Women have always been here.”^{xxvi} And while this seems obvious, it must be reiterated. Involvement of these viewpoints in mainstream speculative fiction writing would help readers engage more with the actual, existing discourses surrounding race in America and would help inspire individuals to imagine a future with less racism. Not every author has to engage with race and racism, but there is a need for considerably greater engagements – and such engagements already exist from anti-racist authors and must be built upon into the future and more actively incorporated into the mainstream. Exclusion of anti-racist authors must be continuously thwarted.

When an anti-racist author such as Butler, Delany, Du Bois, or Jemison emerges, what should readers expect from such authors? What is the role of a politically engaged artist? Many people would argue that a politically engaged artist risks pushing forward an ideology for audiences that may be resistant or not want to be preached to. Audiences may seek pieces of work that do not explicitly tell them what to feel and think, but instead pose questions or concepts to ponder in greater detail. To be clear, I am not advocating for a single way to address race and racism through speculative fiction. There *is* a need to address, however, which could be as simple as not perpetuating problematic tendencies. I have called for explicit engagement and I want to clarify this point. I am not calling for a direct philosophical or theoretical viewpoint to be inflicted upon readers every time they read a speculative fiction text. I am instead calling for authors to ask tangible questions regarding their material and for speculative fiction authors and readers to engage more with creators such as Butler, Delany, Du Bois, and other anti-racist advocates. Each of those authors has different tactics to explore anti-racist thought, yet it is clear

from the work that they *are* engaging with anti-racism. While audiences and readers will inevitably have different interpretations of any particular creative work, speculative fiction authors have a unique power to imagine alternative ways of life and must, therefore, continuously broaden the conversation to encompass more racial truths that may have been left not entirely explored.

The danger, however, lies in the reality that authors run the risk of involuntarily perpetuating racialized or colonial mentalities. This is why delving into the work of anti-racist authors, as well as critically assessing existing speculative fiction texts as indicative of problematic mentalities is vital. In order to change the traditions of speculative fiction, criticism and analyzing must happen pervasively – of both ideal and problematic examples. The goal, at a minimum, is to prevent perpetuation of the common problematic portrayals of race and colonialism in speculative fiction. This does not mean every author must engage, but every author must not perpetuate. In order to not perpetuate, we need to research and further educate ourselves and then advocate for more inclusive space for authors who *are* willing and motivated to engage with anti-racist thought in their narratives. And to be clear: not everyone *should* engage with an overt anti-racist agenda in their narratives. Some authors simply do not have the expertise, life experiences, or interest to introduce anti-racist knowledge or conversations about racism to the masses for meaningful contemplation. We have to be cautious of well-intentioned authors who may unwittingly perpetuate problematic thinking. This is why research and critical assessment of current texts are vitally important. When authors do emerge with enough information and commitment to engaging with progressive, anti-racist thinking, space must be provided without segregation, and instead with encouragement. Speculative fiction has the power to allow for a racist future or fight for an anti-racist one: we should encourage an anti-racist one.

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With a commitment to providing more space for anti-racist content, I plan to explore such concepts within my own work. I am currently drafting a speculative fiction screenplay, entitled *Knowledges*. The premise is – two white brothers are faced with living their lives as the final two humans on earth and have avoided questions about why the world ended in the first place for years. They are largely comfortable and enjoying their life of luxury within suburban neighborhoods. However, when they uncover a wooden chest that provides them with numerous written accounts of life from before everyone else died, they discover a heavily racialized and all-encompassing domestic war that resulted in mass death and destruction. The accounts are written by anti-racist activists, primarily characters of color. Their goal is to shed light on how the construction of whiteness and racial subjugation resulted in this the war that killed everyone – and why any living white individuals are privileged to be alive. As Oscar, the protagonist and older brother, reads the notebooks, he considers that there are likely other chests in his vicinity with more information, and that he can be the one to link all the information together and discover the true reason why the world ended.

I have given much thought to what it means for me, as a white cis-gender male with privilege, to write this story. What I discovered was I have been studying critical race theory for years with much commitment and have a grounding in certain racial theories and discourses. This particular story seems necessary that a white person tell for a white audience. The story focuses on white guilt and how a white individual handles such guilt — and why the guilt often manifests in problematic thoughts and actions that have to be addressed and countered. If a white individual tells the story, a white audience cannot claim that a person of color is assuming things about white identity — in other words, there is little room for the intended audience to escape. I

take notice through this project of the realities of white privilege and the white fixation on actions, purpose, and involvement in ‘progress’ to alleviate feelings of guilt and remorse. In the narrative, Oscar realizes that his younger brother, Simon, cares more about fulfilling a life of peace and ignorance of racial issues because he sees no point in engaging in a meaningless pursuit. Simon does not feel any guilt. After all, everyone is already dead and he must move on. Yet Oscar is committed to unveiling the reason why the world ended – and to do so he must immerse himself in the writings he has been exposed to through his chests and prove to his brother that they need to understand that they, as white individuals benefiting from a racist system, were part of the reason for the end of the world. He attempts to change his brother’s perspective, yet the divisiveness between them becomes harmful and Oscar decides to pursue this new knowledge on his own. He must understand what happened because, unlike his brother, he sees this new information he is learning as having the ability to provide him with meaning for his otherwise meaningless life – meaning attained through solving the puzzle of how the world ended. Additionally, he wishes to alleviate his feelings of immense guilt.

As he continues his journey, Oscar attempts to deconstruct his whiteness through hallucinations he has of white people he grew up around, and explain why their actions were problematic and have to be avoided at all costs. He attempts to distance himself from the white community and ventures into a territory that is considered a “slum” where many people of color lived before they were killed or otherwise died. Oscar decides to live in the “slum” for years so he can understand what it might have been like to be a poor person of color living in the final years of the war. Oscar has information about this area being incredibly unhealthy and disease-invoking, yet he ignores this knowledge because he wants to learn more about racial subjugation. He does not recognize that he can never fully experience this racial subjugation, as he is a white

individual and would likely benefit in ways that a person of color would not in a white supremacist nation.

He develops a bad cough, which one day amounts to him coughing out blood. Fearing death, he panics and reflects upon all his newfound information and knowledge about racism, yet he deems he has yet to decipher the ultimate reason why the world ended. He believes he can do more to understand the reality and escape his whiteness. If he can do these things, then the world will have ended with a solution to racism that he discovered. He can die in peace knowing that racism could be solved, and that he may no longer be complicit because he countered racism through work he believes he would have done even if people were still alive. He consults a map he possesses that lays out where any potential survivors should and should not live and discovers a tiny section of land, between two blacked out areas that he has not ventured to yet, and believes that the final piece to the puzzle is likely there.

He begins a quest to the final destination. On the way, he visits the area where he last saw his brother years before and finds that Simon no longer lives there. Instead of looking for Simon, Oscar decides that his time is limited and instead writes Simon a note explaining that he does not regret turning away from him years ago – as he knows whiteness is problematic and he needed to acquire some perspective into what he never knew so he could no longer perpetuate the problems.

Oscar leaves the area and travels for a while until he finds the final strip of land - his disease having progressed to a worse level. When he arrives, he finds only an empty grass field. He cannot find a chest, and he appears demoralized and helpless as he continuously faints and coughs up blood. When moments seem limited and dire for Oscar, two people emerge out of the trees and discover him. They contemplate if they should save him. Deciding, they guide Oscar to

a hidden society they belong to, made up of primarily people of color and mostly men. All women present have been sterilized and cannot have children - a product of the tragedies that lead up to and existed during the final war.

Upon discovering this newfound society, Oscar has hope and wants to become one of them – to become part of the groups that he felt connected to most through his reading. He presents his findings to the group and wants their knowledge to uncover the final meaning so he can create a new world with them. However, they respond by informing him that the world is already over for them. The chaos that occurred has left no sustainable future – and they cannot have children to work toward making progress. The end of the world, where everyone they knew of died, was a statistical impossibility — yet it happened anyway. And frankly, they tell him, Oscar can never be one of them. The things Oscar learned about were important for him to understand and listen to, but he has to learn that whiteness is unavoidable until the greater system — the collective white supremacist society — grapples with and works toward deconstruction. Avoiding whiteness has to be earned — one cannot simply escape. Oscar, furthermore, cannot insert himself into the solution – his job is to turn to his own community and help change them collectively, he cannot only change himself as an individual. Oscar resists this – he wants to be a part of something better and does not want to be white anymore. He wants there to be a solution to racism, and he wants to have been a part of uncovering that solution. If he can join their community, he has then become a part of the solution. He also wants to have his place in history as the person who made an example of how to be a good white person. He discovers through conversations with the anti-racist community that the reality is this community already knows about racism and has already “solved” the problems. The issue was power - and the white supremacist state had immense power at the end of the world and did not allow their knowledge

to be accepted or spread. Despite their continuous efforts to combat racism throughout their lives, white people simply didn't listen and didn't act in less problematic ways.

Oscar finally discovers that all of the information he possesses about racism is due to the work, theories, and writings of anti-racist scholars and activists from throughout time — all possessing different knowledges and methods. He's indebted to their histories and writings and realizes that he is simply one individual — it would be foolish and futile to confront and save an entire racist society as one person. Racism, he realizes, exists because of systems. He has to accept that he is no white savior, as this is impossible. The only true way to combat racism is for him to realize that he is one product of a racist system and has to accept that his singular role will do something — so long as he is encouraging other people to have singular roles as well. With hope and this realization, Oscar returns to find his brother with two other white individuals from the secret society. They aim to deconstruct whiteness together — through education and listening to what the anti-racist people of color had told them while in the secret community.

I see a prevalence, including within myself, of white people trying to distance themselves from complicity, even if they intellectually understand that they are white and perpetuate problems. The issue lies in the white desire to “solve” issues, or be the one to have credit and be a model that others can be inspired by. There seems a fixation on alleviating white guilt. This problematically inserts the white self into communities, theories, or practices that white people can never fully be a part of or understand. There's a fixation on fixing the future and deconstructing, yet this is not a tangible goal yet. White individuals, first, have to address their communities at large rather than try to save and be a part of other communities. Oscar wants to insert himself into this new community and has been searching for a way to solve the issues of racism throughout the movie so he could be a unique and meaningful individual with a purpose –

in effect, to be a part of the ultimate solution. Oscar, throughout the movie, strives to be a savior and solver, rather than to simply understand the issues and accept the fact that it's too late to fully fix the problems that he helped perpetuate – even if it was involuntary. Oscar realizes that his fixation on actions and “doing good” is unavoidable, but he owes it to the victims of oppression to act in more intentional, less problematic ways. He should harness his desire to be exceptional into actions that are approved of by communities who have experienced racism far more than he has — and who understand better solutions than he ever could.

The finale of the movie shows Oscar returning to his brother, Simon, who has been demoralized by living a life of solitude and empty privilege. When they reunite, Oscar attempts to appeal to his brother by telling him that they need each other. They can deconstruct whiteness and understand what could have been. They owe it to the past in order to take the necessary step to understand how they should have conducted themselves before it was too late. They have to uncover the inevitabilities of whiteness and then collectively understand what has to stop. Yet, Simon remains resistant. He sees Oscar's request as futile because there is no hope for the future. Oscar's realizations arrive far too late. Communities have died and there is no hope for the future at this point. This references, I hope, a point about the consequences of colonialism in general that I think is not explored enough – that billions of people have died unfairly and for those individuals and their families it is way too late. Well-intentioned white people who think they can solve the issue must realize that the issue can never be fully solved. Deaths have already occurred and lasting consequences will continue —no final escape from the guilt exists, and such an escape never will exist.

In the narrative, there is no hope for progress and it's imaginable that an audience might be discouraged by such a pessimistic ending. I find it crucial, however, for audiences to realize

that progress is not obtained easily and in some views, the quest for progress from white individuals comes too late. Additionally, the hope of concluding the narrative in such a way is that upon further investigation the audience would realize that the ending in this narrative is highly unlikely. The world, realistically, will not end as it does in the story — at least not in the immediate or near future. The characters in the story explicitly state that this mass death was a statistical impossibility. In real life, there will be a future with new offspring— and the audience can understand that while colonialism and racism can never fully be escaped, there can be an edging toward improvement. Yes, communities have died and racism has progressed to haunting and disastrous, irredeemable levels, but the future *will* continue. These brothers could not mend their relationship, but audiences can. Audiences can realize that, through a commitment to listening and accepting their place as individuals within a system, rather than individuals who are separate from the system or can escape the system, people in the future do not have to suffer as many consequences as the people of the past. There can be an edging toward an anti-racist future.

ⁱ Inderpal Grewal, “‘Security Moms’ in the Early Twentieth-Century United States: The Gender of Security in Neoliberalism,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 28.

ⁱⁱ André M. Carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carrington, *Speculative Blackness*, 9.

^{iv} Carrington, *Speculative Blackness*, 17.

^v Carrington, *Speculative Blackness*, 3.

^{vi} Samuel R. Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction,” *The New York Review of Science Fiction* Issue 120 (August 1998).

^{vii} Carrington, *Speculative Blackness*, 16.

^{viii} Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction.”

^{ix} Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction.”

^x Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction.”

^{xi} Gary K. Wolfe, “The Remaking of Zero: Beginning at the End,” in *The End of the World*, ed. Eric S. Rabkin, Martin Harry Greenberg, Joseph D. Olander (Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 1.

^{xii} Wolfe, “Remaking of Zero”, 6.

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- ^{xiii} Ray Bradbury, "The Highway," in *The Illustrated Man*, ed. Ray Bradbury (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1951).
- ^{xiv} H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (William Heinemann, 1898), 7.
- ^{xv} Noah Berlatsky, "Why Sci-Fi Keeps Imagining the Subjugation of White People," *The Atlantic*, April 25, 2014.
- ^{xvi} Wolfe, "Remaking of Zero", 14.
- ^{xvii} Neel Ahuja, "Posthuman New York: Ground Zero of the Anthropocene" in *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human*, ed. Michael Lundblad (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 44-45
- ^{xviii} Ahuja, "Posthuman New York," 50.
- ^{xix} Isiah III Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 23
- ^{xx} Octavia E. Butler, *Xenogenesis* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1987-1989).
- ^{xxi} Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction*, 21.
- ^{xxii} Ursula K. Le Guin, "American SF and the Other," *Science Fiction Studies* Volume 2, Part 3 (1975).
- ^{xxiii} Le Guin, "American SF and the Other".
- ^{xxiv} W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet" in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, ed. W.E.B. Du Bois (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1920).
- ^{xxv} Alexandra Alter, "N.K. Jemisin on Diversity in Science Fiction and Inspiration from Dreams," *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016.
- ^{xxvi} Alter, "N.K. Jemisin."