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Editor’s Corner: Third Stone Manifesto
Myrtle Jones, Editor

“Bin-Ya. I intentionally emphasize the YA. Saying his name in this way forces me to keep my mouth open and breathe out air. Binya, whom I affectionately called my pumpkin, advocated for everyone to breathe and to breathe out full breaths. The kind of breath that reminds you of GOD’s love and the love all around. Binya exuded love even when he was flaming you on social media. His intensity was grounded in his love and fierce advocacy for love and staunch battle against anything that stood in its way. He fought for love so hard because he knew what a love deferred and a love denied felt like. He was able to see and experience love in words, images, sounds, faces, and places. He connected people all over the globe with love as his aim. During his more cogent moments, recently we pondered ways to link people throughout the Diaspora. Although not physically there, I hope in the midst of all of our sadness, we find a way to dance and smile and write and draw and build and create. Binya would want us to come together and celebrate and discover and find and explore our entire selves with mouths open to breathe out and take in full breaths. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.” (May 30, 2019, Binyavanga Wainaina Memorial, Nairobi National Museums, Botanical Gardens)

The above was read during the memorial service of my dear friend and “Pumpkin,” Binyavanga Wainaina. In several of his tributes, he was described as being an Afofuturist (Binyavanga Wainaina Archive, 2019). This first issue is dedicated to Binya not because he was or would even ascribe the term. It is dedicated to him because he was committed to expanding the ways in which people throughout the diaspora lived, created, built, produced, imagined, and simply were. Similarly, Third Stone was conceived as a space and a place for people of color throughout the Diaspora to breathe out and take in full breaths.

The term Afrofuturism, coined by Mark Dery (1994), is problematic to some for a plethora of reasons. I don’t like using the word problem, as challenge has in its meaning resistance and overcoming. Problems need to be fixed, and challenges must be overcome. See, the very notion of Africa is ascribed to a place that is the source of all human and possibly other kind. The place we now call Africa was given its name by others (Mudimbe, 1988). It is not the name from those within the space. See, using “Afro” in the term is at the core of the challenge. Then there is also a challenge with this idea of, “future.” How is future being defined and by whom? Black people are FANTASTIC, which transcends time, space and all matter. We aim to celebrate all modes of the Black Fantastic!

Yet, I would be naïve if I did not acknowledge the power in terms and ascribed labels. Formation, and group formation, is an integral part of resistance. It is important that the challenges with the label Afrofuturism be acknowledged. Third Stone is a space for truth-telling and, truth be told, we, too, have problems with the term, which is why it is not the title yet is in the verbiage as a descriptor.

The genesis of the idea was the creation of a platform to demonstrate digital humanities by selecting a subject matter apropos to the “discipline.” Seretha Williams and I connected last summer, as her daughter attended a conference at Columbia University. We saw this as an opportunity to extend digital humanities, yet another problematic ascribed name. Third Stone is our quest to extend the distribution of things for Us, by Us, and about Us, with Us being an inclusive term inviting like-minded people to the space. Jeffrey Renard Allen suggested the term Third Stone...
while we were brainstorming a title for the space that was inclusive but also grounded in a historical trajectory. Moreover, “Third Stone from the Sun” is the title of a Jimi Hendrix song on the album, *Are You Experienced* (1967), and serves as a cultural touchstone demarcating the historical trajectory of this space.

Afrofuturism as a subject matter predates the existence of the term coined by Dery in the 1990s. Oral histories from slaves demonstrate that part of their existence and hope was their investment in a life trajectory communicating, creating, and imagining their past, present, and future. Imagination is at the core of Afrofuturism, which injects activism by advocating for the removal of all obstacles that seek to stifle or silence people of African descent, their imagination, and things produced as a result.

Ironically, the launch of Ryan Coogler’s *Black Panther* and its ultimate success brought Afrofuturism, or what English and Kim (2013) describe as neo-Afrofuturism, to the mainstream. *Black Panther*, the comic and subsequent film, was conceived by two men not of immediate African descent, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. If all humans derived from Africa, we are all of African descent; it is the immediacy of your lineage, which I would argue has impact. But I digress and want to stay focused on the journal or rather the space, as the word *journal* is also a challenge, as it conjures pages and formats that we hope to transcend, extend, and move beyond. Concerned about where this media concern with “Afrofuturism” could lead, we launched *Third Stone* to place a stake somewhere (I won’t say in the sand), as our aim is to participate in a space that is both inclusive and expansive. Some of the objectives of *Third Stone* include to:

- Provide multimodal content
- Serve as a hub for Black DH, “e-black studies,” “digital Blackness”
- Promote public history and humanities
- Build networks of scholars, practitioners, and activists
- Create an epistemological meeting space for Black liberation
- Advocate for the rights of digital authors and creators
- Influence pedagogy, curricula, and canon

Just as *Soul Train* welcomed everyone “aboard for an absolutely mind-blowing voyage,” we invite you to join us in this space and place devoted to modes of the Black Fantastic.

References


Interview with Corey Washington, Independent Scholar on Jimi Hendrix
Seretha D. Williams (3/6/2019)

Most people in Augusta, GA, know Corey Washington. He is a popular history teacher, beloved by his students and their parents. He is a patron of music, attending local cultural events and supporting the burgeoning live music scene in the region. He is an independent author and expert on the life and music of Jimi Hendrix. Having seen him at the Augusta Literary Festival on multiple occasions and purchased one of his books on Hendrix for a friend, I decided to reach out to Mr. Washington for an interview on Hendrix, whom scholars describe as an icon of Afrofuturism.

1. **How did you first become interested in Jimi Hendrix?** I always have to mention the name of a disgraced individual Hulk Hogan, who was later exposed as a racist. But he was the one that hipped me to Hendrix because of his ring entrance music: “Voodoo Child.” The song opened with some weird scratching sounds, which I later learned was Jimi’s precursor to a DJ scratching. He was manipulating the wah-wah pedal to get those sounds from his guitar. That drew me in, and I’ve been collecting his music and researching him ever since. That was in 1996.

2. **What was your methodology for researching Hendrix?** At first, I searched Hendrix like everyone else—books, movies, DVDs, CDs, liner notes. But I noticed that there were very few writers of color writing about Hendrix. I also noticed that when European writers wrote about Hendrix, they brought their cultural biases to the table, which meant downplaying his R&B influences, glossing over his funk explorations, and sometimes even erasing his blackness. You would hear quotes like ‘Jimi never saw color, or Jimi didn’t think of himself as black,’ or you would see them ascribe exotic labels to dilute Jimi’s Blackness by over-emphasizing his Native American ancestry. I took all this in and wanted to focus my research on examining Jimi Hendrix from a Black perspective, which means talking to Black people from all walks of life, people that knew Jimi and those that didn’t, in order to get a well-rounded view of how he affected Black music, life, culture, and people. I examined his quotes and actions and put them in the context of a Black man in the 60s, who’s been ushered in as the top of the food chain when it came to a white-dominated field, Rock-n-roll. When you do that, you start to understand how Jimi had to wear that mask and code switch in order to speak to two separate audiences at a time. So just by looking at Jimi Hendrix through a Black lens, you pick up on a lot of information that other Hendrix researchers missed or glossed over. Follow ups: He tells me white scholars feel the need to separate Hendrix from Black excellence.

3. **How is your approach to Hendrix different from the approaches of other Hendrix biographers?** I started with a premise that Jimi Hendrix was not well-respected in the Black community. I also came from a position where I thought Hendrix was a sell-out, so
in my research, I wanted to challenge myself and my own failings. My approach to Hendrix is a lot more personal than other Hendrix biographers because my research was constantly evolving and shaping my perceptions about Hendrix. I also became a much needed advocate for Hendrix in the Black community. Follow ups: Washington indicated that Hendrix had to do what he had to do, like the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar entitled, “We Wear the Mask.” Hendrix code switches. Washington refutes this notion of Hendrix as a sell out or outlier. He advocates for Hendrix’s inclusion in the Black cultural canon.

4. What connections do you make between Hendrix and other musicians that may surprise readers? I go deep with my connections when it comes to Jimi and P-Funk, Hip-Hop, and Jazz. For instance, Jimi’s exploration of space was a bridge between the musings of Sun Ra and George Clinton’s Mothership Connection. Just as Sun Ra and Clinton spoke about space as a means of escapism, Jimi was talking about U.F.O.s and building machines to breathe underwater. I have a chapter in my book that compares Jimi and Prince, but it goes beyond the usual comparisons and contrasts. I connect Jimi to hip-hop in all of its stages and show how even modern rappers have been influenced by him like Drake, Whiz Khalifa, Andre 3000, and Future. I show how various artists have name dropped Jimi in their songs. Taking all that information shows that Jimi had a lasting impact on hip-hop culture. If the actual connections don’t surprise readers, the depth of the connections will. Follow ups: In “1983,” Hendrix is singing about a merman. Future refers to himself as Future Hendrix. Many contemporary Black artists name drop Hendrix. Pimps and hustlers began to dress like Hendrix after his death; look at the fashion in Superfly (1972).

5. Can Hendrix’s music be categorized? How would you describe his sound, his art? Any category that you place Hendrix’s music in would be inadequate. You would have to break Jimi’s music down into several categories and subcategories to even try to do his music justice. His sound at his peak was a fusion sound. At the beginning of his playing career, he had a strong R&B/Blues base but continued to add more flavor in terms of the various styles of rock guitar. When he went to England, he took the British Rock sound and integrated it into his R&B/Blues sound; then he took the emerging technology and created a futuristic sound of feedback, shrieks, and wails that guitar players have been trying to catch up to in the last fifty years. Then you combine his futuristic sound and couple that with lyrics ranging from highly abstract and profound to concrete positive affirmations of liberation and freedom. His sound and lyrics ran the gamut from classical, flamenco, ballads, and soft rock, to funk, heavy metal, fusion, and even an early form of hip-hop. Follow ups: I asked what is Hendrix doing, technique wise, that is futuristic? Washington said Hendrix’s use of feedback is key. He played so loudly and was able to manipulate feedback in a way no one else had or could, as demonstrated through the music’s shrieks and wails. He uses the emerging technology: panning, stereo, speeding up/slowing down, new innovations for wah-wah pedal. Hendrix takes the old and adds technology to create something new. (Thus, the fusion is not just a blend of musical genres; it is also the application of older and newer techniques.) Hendrix has abstract and concrete lyrics.

6. What makes Hendrix unique among his peers? Hendrix walked in two different worlds. He was deeply entrenched amongst Rock royalty and was the top concert draw at the peak of his career. And he also was hanging out in Harlem with people from the hood. He had
his ear to several different scenes and you could hear his music gravitating towards the Funk sound that he helped pioneer after his untimely death. Hendrix emerged from the R&B Chitlin’ Circuit with an incredible sense of rhythm, timing, and showmanship; then, he fused modern technology and mixed the primal or raw sounds with the most advanced electrical gadgets, pedals, and studio equipment of his time. So he had the best of both worlds. He had the soul and the God-given talent that white British guitar players would die for. He was cut from the same cloth as the bluesmen that the British worshipped like Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, etc. And he had the financial backing and support that the Black players wished they had. Jimi played the biggest festivals, filled out arenas all over the world, and had lots of fame and attention. Follow ups: Washington says Hendrix is an incredible rhythm guitar player. He has rhythm, timing, and showmanship and applies the new technology. He walks in two different worlds.

7. Some include Hendrix in the category of “Afrofuturism.” Included in this category are Sun Ra and the Arkestra, George Clinton and Parliament, Newcleus, Jonzun Crew, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force, Erykah Badu, Janelle Monae, and others. Do you understand why some would describe Hendrix as Afrofuturistic? Is there something otherworldly about Hendrix or his music? Yes, Hendrix’s whole swagger is drenched in Afrofuturism. He had the futuristic sound, gadgets, technology. He was able to paint sound pictures. His lyrics were steeped in Sci-Fi content. He was so good at what he did, people would say he had to be from another world, as opposed to giving him credit as an extremely talented black man. His wardrobe was otherworldly. He had the total Afrofuturistic package. The sounds that he created, they now have advanced computers to try and emulate what he was doing with primitive equipment. That’s how much control he had over feedback. Manipulating and controlling electricity and static, some would say that’s musical alchemy. Follow ups: Hendrix wears women’s clothing attire but makes those items masculine. (Little Richard wears women’s items, but the public does not see him as masculine presenting. Pushing the envelope of gender norms lays groundwork for Prince.) Hendrix exposes the beauty in dissonance; listen to “Purple Haze,” which opens with what is called a “devil’s chord.” Listen to “Valleys of Neptune.”

8. What do you believe Hendrix’s objective(s) were with his music? Ultimately, Jimi wanted people to be free. His style of playing was free form; he would constantly break out of the structures of his songs. He never played his songs the same way. His lyrics were penetrating the deep recesses of people’s minds and activating portions that forced them to use their imagination. If his music was dominant on Black urban radio, I’m convinced that the current condition of young Black youth would be different because his music encourages higher-order thinking skills. Of course, Hendrix’s music was trying to bring people together, but his songs like “Machine Gun” and “Star-Spangled Banner” exposed the forces that were determined to exploit people and take advantage of their fears and prejudices. His message in his music was just as big a threat to the warmongers of the Vietnam War as MLK talking out against the war. Jimi Hendrix had the ears of millions of youth. And what Jimi was preaching wasn’t in line with what the powers that be were pushing to the masses in the late 60s to early 70s. Follow ups: Hendrix’s free form inspires other musicians to break out of the structure. His music is imaginative and through imagination we can get free. “Straight Ahead” is an example of Hendrix’s commentary on the Civil Rights
Movement. I mention that it is interesting that although Hendrix’s music was about rebellion and challenging the establishment, we don’t hear him played as part of the soundtrack of Civil Rights. He’s associated with Hippies and Anti-Vietnam but not Eyes on the Prize.

9. Your books Nobody Cages Me and Jimi Hendrix--Black Legacy: (A Dream Deferred) grapple with Hendrix’s legacy. What do you think his legacy is? How is that legacy informed or defined by race? Jimi’s legacy is being one of the most influential musicians in the world, changing the way people play and listen to music. His legacy did not transcend race but rather transcended music and seeped into the very fabric of this country. People carried themselves like Jimi, dressed like him, lived like him. A huge part of his popularity stemmed from his blackness. Because of many complex factors that I bring out in Black Legacy, his legacy in the Black community has to be peeled back in layers. Jimi doesn’t have the support of major Black institutions, so his impact and influence is spread out among individuals, namely musicians and a wide array of black listeners who are attracted to Jimi for various reasons. Jimi has a strong black base of fans, but you wouldn’t know it unless you started asking around. Follow Ups: Hendrix changes how people play.

10. Afrofuturists are interested in the blending of past, present, and future in their art. In what ways do you see this blending or fusion happening in Hendrix’s work? Jimi has always been fascinated with the oldest of black musical traditions. His playing of the blues is a throwback tribute to his musical ancestors. His song “Up from the Skies” expresses the idea that alien technology is really from the past rather than the future since it pre-dates our civilization. In my book, JHBL, I interviewed Jimmy Bleu, another Hendrix historian. He mentions that Jimi met at least twice with Sun Ra, one time right before Jimi recorded Electric Lady and another time at the Katherine Dunham center. So Jimi was well aware of the teachings of Sun Ra. And also Jimi was very forward thinking, not just with technology and studio techniques, but his session with Lightning Rod of the Last Poets and Buddy Miles was a glimpse into the future, with hip-hop. I have an interview with Cordell Dickerson, who talks about the Battle of Los Angeles and how Jimi was talking about how sounds of certain frequencies could heal people, how sound could be used to stop machines from working and even being used as weapons. We can see some of this today with sonic weapons.

11. Afrofuturists are also interested in the ways in which art can liberate Black people. How do you think Hendrix’s art liberated him and/or Black people? Jimi’s music expanded the vocabulary of the guitar. The former rigid structure of chicken scratch R&B/Soul/Funk guitar was not adventurous enough for Jimi. This freed people up to express themselves more freely with their instruments. People like Ernie Isley, Eddie Hazel, Mike Hampton, and later Prince were given the green light by Hendrix to play with freedom. Jimi’s formation of the Band of Gypsies was even more explicit, as he showed how a soulful sound with fatback drumming and heavy bass could be combined with experimental rock/blues guitar. If you listen to the music after the BOGs, you can hear the liberation and freedom in the players. Jimi’s lyrics also directly addressed freedom and liberation. Songs like “Freedom,” “Straight Ahead,” and “The Power of Soul” are his best examples.
12. **What’s next for you and your reclamation of Hendrix as an icon for Black culture?**

I’m still working to get the BOGs inducted into the Rock and the R&B Hall of Fame. I’m working with one of Jimi’s friends in NYC, TaharQu Aleem, to commemorate the fiftieth-year anniversary of Jimi’s outdoor concert in Harlem. I want the new book to get out into the hands of the public. The feedback that I’ve gotten has been very positive. Many people are saying that they learned new things about Hendrix. I want to try to do a Netflix styled documentary connecting the dots on Jimi’s Black legacy. I just have to find the resources and the right person to partner with.

**Afrofuturism Songs of Hendrix (list created by Corey Washington):**

- Third Stone from the Sun
- Aye
- EXP A:BAL
- Up From the Skies
- And the Gods Made Love
- Voodoo Chile
- 1983
- House Burning Down
- Voodoo Child (Slight Return)
- Purple Haze
- Stars that Play with Laughing
- Astro Man
- Paligap
- Midnight
- Valleys of Neptune

Corey Washington was born in Jamaica Queens and raised in Brooklyn; his musical sensibilities were shaped in New York City and honed in Augusta, GA, the home of James Brown and Jessye Norman. A history teacher and independent scholar, Washington is the author of two self-published books on Hendrix: *Jimi Hendrix--Black Legacy: (A Dream Deferred)* (2019) and *Nobody Cages Me* (2010). Follow him on Twitter [@jimibl](https://twitter.com/jimibl).
AFRO ARRAY
I see the future as the intermingling of cultures, narratives, theories, histories, realms, and awareness; the paradoxical existence of art forms and innovations in material and virtual spaces...

NETTRICE GASKINS
FIRE WRITER
...the immersive intelligence of the viewer/observer and sometimes collaborator in diverse creative spaces...

NETTRICE GASKINS
...and the constant shifting and pushing of boundaries. These combinations can become the art of inclusion and possibilities.
Artist Statement
Nettrice Gaskins

My work extends notions of the intermedial by breaking down boundaries between myriad art forms. My artwork sits at the juncture between traditional (analog) and new media, which includes the interplay between technology, images, performance, and sound. I have used the Internet as a platform to exhibit my work, especially in online and virtual 3D environments where different ideas are expanded beyond what is possible in the physical world. Currently, my process includes the generation of images based on collaboration with artificial intelligence, taking my digital practice further into the speculative with visions of many possible scenarios.

I use Deep Dream Generator’s algorithm, which is inspired by the human brain. The generator uses the stylistic elements of one image to draw the content of another. The first picture defines the portrait I want to create and the second picture I upload gives the program a style to simulate. The process may include more than one pass in the generator, using different style images until I get the image I want.

As a researcher, I see the future as the intermingling of cultures, narratives, theories, histories, realms, and awareness; the paradoxical existence of art forms and innovations in material and virtual spaces; the immersive intelligence of the viewer/observer and sometimes collaborator in diverse creative spaces; and the constant shifting and pushing of boundaries. These combinations can become the art of inclusion and possibilities.
On Origins

Cheryl R. Hopson

Last night I dreamed that I,
not my house but I was a stop
on the Underground Railroad, and I
huddled masses in the bend and tuck
of my skirt and bellowed “Shhhh,”
and the safe space of I held, until
I sent them flying, fleeing not knowing
but trusting in the strength of the well-oiled
collective, and I awoke, startled
by what was, for all intents and purposes,
a nightmare—

Reverse me, She
born 110 years before
the Emancipation Proclamation, born
unfree to a woman born
unfree to a woman born free
and speaking an old tongue, carrying
life that begot life, that begot
me, and I reverse the curse,
end it.
#hertoo

Cheryl R. Hopson

I am coming for you
grown, and unafraid
I will make you fear me
will take a two-by-four of words
across your back, will
bring you down to your shot
knees. My intention is
to do you harm for the ways
you broke young girls, trapped
in a fantasy lived out on their
bodies.

Get ready.
Racial Reassignment Surgery and the Dissolution of the Color Line: Afrofuturist Satire in George Schuyler’s *Black No More* and Jess Row’s *Your Face in Mine*

Christopher Allen Varlack

**Abstract:** Racial passing, during the antebellum period, was a way in which African-American peoples sought to escape the throes of slavery and the physical and psychological abuse associated with the plantation tradition. In time, racial passing became a way of obtaining the social, economic, and political opportunities denied people of color in the discriminatory and racially-biased United States. This study, however, examines a specific form of racial passing— that of racial reassignment surgery— as explored in George Schuyler’s *Black No More* and Jess Row’s *Your Face in Mine* as a way to test the theory that assimilation and miscegenation would one day resolve the color line that had left generations of African-American peoples disenfranchised and dispossessed. At the same time, this study examines the Afrofuturist sensibilities in these two key works of the Harlem Renaissance era and present day to understand how such authors not only counter the troubling histories of their time but also propose counter-futures that would otherwise have been buried beneath the cultural oppression of Jim Crow and other more modern forms of racism.

**Keywords:** counter-futures; Jim Crow; racial passing; racial reassignment surgery; satire

In his 1966 autobiographical work, George S. Schuyler—one of the most influential and yet controversial authors of the Harlem Renaissance era—notes that “[a] black person learns very early that his color is a disadvantage in a world of white folk” (1). Because of the spread of Jim Crow cultural oppression across the United States and the infiltration of racist stereotypes in the U.S. cultural imagination, life for the African-American community was far from easy, as black codes and other social strictures were “designed” and implemented in an effort “to constrict the opportunities of all African Americans and to secure a political and economic order that depended upon the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of large parts of the southern population as a whole” (Dailey xv). For the African-American people, the results of this systematic oppression were clear: restricted to menial roles as the second-class citizens of a growing society and denied equal access to educational opportunities and resources comparable to those made available to whites, they were ultimately trapped in a social and economic system that left little room for them to climb. In other words, there was a clear glass ceiling hanging dangerously overhead and though the African-American people held hope of ushering in a new dawn and obtaining the liberty as well as equality long denied them, an earth-shattering societal transformation would be required to break the chains of this new kind of enslavement (economic or otherwise) that the community at large had to face.

Racial passing—a source of contention and controversy across the United States—was then one option for escaping the restrictions placed upon them for those African-American peoples of light enough complexion to pass for white and gain access to the social, political, and/or economic opportunities traditionally denied them. Dating back to the antebellum period, racial passing was a tool employed by individuals such as Ellen Craft to escape the throes of slavery through the act of performing whiteness—an act that requires more than just the appearance of white skin but also “a nuanced understanding of southern social and gender norms,” those crucial intersections of “race and class” (Hobbs 46). Post-Emancipation, the goals of racial passing morphed. No longer focused on just obtaining freedom from enslavement, those who decided to pass were generally...
interested in access to what Cheryl I. Harris terms “whiteness as property” (1714)—the opportunities and securities of white skin as a signifier of power in a society where Blackness was targeted for discrimination and further abuse.

These experiences, however, did not just provide insight into the Jim Crow culture and the sacrifices Black men and women often had to make in electing to pass. As Hee-Jung Serenity Joo notes, such narratives “reveal the constructed and fragile nature of racial categories” and the potential to fundamentally alter “the hypocritical and discriminatory system of US democracy that [erroneously] equated white skin with freedom and citizenship” (171). This in large part is the function of racial passing in fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—texts such as Flight by Walter White or The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man by James Weldon Johnson that call attention to the prevalence of racial indeterminacy in the United States as a way of decoupling whiteness from power/freedom and Blackness from disempowerment/oppression. By illustrating the ways in which this strict racial order has already begun to collapse and the strategies employed to reposition oneself on either side of the color line, these works highlight race as a social construct, a temporal fixture in a constantly evolving society. At the same time, they offer a necessary look into “[t]he broader processes of race-making in the United States” and “demonstrate that the concept of race can be specious but also utterly real” (Hobbs 8).

In his 1931 satirical novel, Black No More, Schuyler explores this paradigm, specifically employing the crucible of fiction to test the theory, long held by some among the educated class, that “the color line will be dissolved eventually by the light-skinned Negroids ‘passing white,’ by miscegenation and final assimilation by the white group” (McKay 351). In the novel, his focus is less on racial intermarriage and more on the kinds of cultural and ideological miscegenation that can occur when the color line finally collapses (knowingly or not). Here, Schuyler paints a world where technological production enables African Americans to modify the color of their skin and, along with it, elevate their status as members of a dejected race—those seen by some as the dregs of American society. In the process, this “mock race novel aimed like a precision-guided weapon at the central features of popular 1920s race mythology informing the perspectives of whites and blacks alike. In hitting his target, Schuyler not only challenged racial perspectives in his time, he also struck hard at many perennial themes of American racial consciousness” (Ferguson 213). And yet, Schuyler was not the only one to pursue this critique. Jess Row in his 2014 novel, Your Face in Mine also focuses on the future possibility of racial passing through racial reassignment surgery, though in this case, he is focused on the transformation his character endures from white to Black.

By examining these two novels in conversation, we can reach a better understanding of how authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries both use racial reassignment to interrogate the possibility of conquering the racial divide as we look toward a potentially post-racial society. At the same time, this study will enable us to interrogate the long-lasting implications of these two novels on a future slowly becoming our present reality—Afrofuturism as a guide to negotiating racial identity conflicts today.

“Get Out, Get White or Get Along”: Addressing the Race Problem through the Afrofuturist Sensibilities in George Schuyler’s Black No More

In his 2003 article, “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism,” Kodwo Eshun declares that Afrofuturism is “a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century [that is] hostile to Afro-diasporic projection” (301). As a literary and cultural lens, Afrofuturism, as Eshun suggests, works to challenge the marginalization of a peoples once maligned as inferior or primitive while reclaiming the counter-futures that they envisioned for peoples across the diaspora that may otherwise have been disrupted by the cycle of discrimination and cultural oppression at
work. At the same time, as Adriano Elia acknowledges in “The Languages of Afrofuturism,” this movement “and its political agenda are aimed at an epistemology rewriting the history of the past and imagining a positive future for people of African descent” (84). The two foci are absolutely essential in Afrofuturist works, like Schuyler’s, because the skewed record of History often fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of histories within a given moment in time while “overlook[ing] the contemporary demographic, political, social, and economic processes that prop up this ethnic boundary, reconstructing it, and producing tension along its borders and within the two bounded ethnic groups” (Nagel 5) that inherently influence which futures we see as viable and which futures are simply ignored. If these thinkers are thus correct that Afrofuturist visions entail simultaneously rewriting, reconstructing, and reimagining, then this can become the lens by which we approach Afrofuturist texts, transcending the present—which some regard as a fiction—in order to examine such critical ideas outside of the boundaries of time and space.

Afrofuturist in its inquiry, Black No More by George Schuyler, then, envisions a world in which Black peoples can alter the color of their skin in just days and, in the process, presumably escape the harrowing experience of Jim Crow. From the early pages of the novel, the narrator calls attention to the possibilities for protagonist Max Disher (later Matthew Fisher, post-reassignment): “No more Jim Crow. No more insults. As a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last” (Schuyler, BNM 8). In these words, the narrator reveals the ways in which color has become a kind of enslavement for members of the African-American community, relegating its people to a fundamentally second-class status and leaving them dispossessed, stripped of any opportunity at achieving the power and property associated with white skin. But by electing to undergo the racial reassignment procedure, to pass for white in a society in which whiteness holds a privileged position, Disher imagines for himself and for the larger Black community a raceless future after centuries struggling for recognition of their legitimacy. Science and technology, as consistent with Afrofuturist works, then become the gateway for radical societal transformation. As Elia declares, “[T]he futuristic and supernatural elements...show a new way to deal with old issues” like those of the racial divide (94).

This vision of a raceless or post-racial future is also shared by Dr. Junius Crookman, the inventor of this groundbreaking technology. Eager to address what he considered maybe “the most annoying problem in American life,” he believed that “if there were no Negroes, Americans could concentrate their attention on something constructive. Through his efforts and the activities of Black-No-More, Incorporated, it would be possible to do what agitation, education and legislation had failed to do” (Schuyler, BNM 34): to eradicate the color line and the culture of racism that was so deeply engrained in the United States. Though his ideas are somewhat naive in that they do not demonstrate a thorough understanding of how deep the racial divide was across the United States, his intentions are described as pure, for Crookman, the quintessential race man, “prided himself above all on being a great lover of his race” and was determined “to remove all obstacles in” the path of the African-American people, even if that meant “depriving them of their racial characteristics” (Ibid). Like Schuyler himself uses the novel to test the theory that the eradication of color will yield a more equal, more democratic society, Crookman, too, advances this endeavor, developing new technologies to rewrite past histories where “superficial, innocuous qualities [had] distinguished Caucasians from black Americans” and to instead offer a worldview in which all “Americans whether black or white are simply Americans” (Thaggert 91).

The notion of invisibility or transparency is therefore vital to the Afrofuturist themes that the novel explores. As David Deluliiis and Jeff Lohr note in their essay, “Rewriting the Narrative: Communicology and the Speculative Discourse of Afrofuturism,” invisibility is a central feature
of the Black experience. Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is a quintessential example of this, for the protagonist’s “invisibility,” they claim, necessarily “results from a ‘phenomenological slippage’ (Yancey 2008, 76) between being black and cultural perceptions of the black body, from being not only invisible, but also divisible and dispossessed from the rational discourse of a ‘whitewashed’ society (Yaszek 2005, 297)” (Deluiliis and Lohr 169). As Deluiliis and Lohr suggest, the state of invisibility is a direct consequence of the negative stigmatization of Blackness and the histories of race, particularly in the United States where the minstrel tradition, Jim Crow cultural aggression, and the later counter-initiative to the Civil Rights Movement all worked to cast African-American peoples as contemptible, inferior, and at times even dangerous beings. What we see here is a clear reminder that “the body is a site of contested meanings” (Yancy xxii)—those both internal and external to the body itself. And when those meanings do not align, a kind of invisibility emerges, the individual not seen nor heard in society, the kind of political experience that long dictated the way that African-American peoples maneuvered through American life.

The procedure developed by Dr. Junius Crookman in the novel is, then, a tool to open up once denied opportunities by breaking down the color line for Blacks and giving them access to the hypervisibility of whiteness as well as the power that accompanies finally being seen. In the text, Fisher, for instance, assumes a leadership position within the Knights of Nordica—a satirized version of the Ku Klux Klan—the ultimate position of power amidst the ensuing chaos once the color line dissipates but not the negative stigma and fears of race. As Miriam Thaggert notes in *Images of Black Modernism: Verbal and Visual Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance*, for Schuyler, the notion of racial difference was a disreality. As he believed, “the mixture of races and cultures in the United States makes the boundaries between racial categories indistinct” (Thaggert 91)—a fact made all the more apparent with the disappearance of the Black body in the text. Here science and technology become the key to the racial erasure witnessed in *Black No More* and with it the removal of the obstacle of color that rendered the African-American community at large invisible, despite its growing population in the world. That hypervisibility is then accentuated by the supra-whiteness that those who have transitioned adopt.

In using the crucible of fiction to redress the factors that perpetuated the color line across the United States, Schuyler recognized that the stigmatization of color was only part of the problem that needed to be addressed and therefore he worked to highlight the other contributing factors like the race-based institutions that feed off of racial conflict to exist. Thaggert acknowledges this as well, declaring, “Schuyler’s strategy for contending with the question of black representation was to exaggerate, to parody any and all groups that sought to exploit race for any motive” (91), including organizations such as the NAACP and the Ku Klux Klan. As the African-American masses flock to the sanitariums to undergo the Black-No-More procedure, Schuyler describes the ensuing chaos that emerges, for example, in Black society and the institutions that depended upon racial paranoia and the racial divide to persist. He writes that “Santop Licorice, head of the once-flourishing Back-To-Africa Society, was daily raising his stentorian voice in denunciation of the race for deserting his organization” (Schuyler, *BNM* 62), just as he critiques “Negro politicians in the various Black Belts, [who had] grown fat and sleek ‘protecting’ vice with the aid of Negro votes which they were able to control by virtue of housing segregation” (Ibid), and the National Social Equity League that “had for forty years carried on the fight for full social equality” (63) but “were never so happy and excited as when a Negro was barred from a theater or fried to a crisp” (64).

What we see in the passages above is evidence of a kind of racial capitalism at work that proved inherently counterproductive to the uplift agenda and the push for social equality for the African-American people in a highly prejudicial society. Profiting off of the hardship the Black
community had to endure under the Jim Crow system, organizations like the NAACP—satirized as the Negro Social Equity League above—cheered, Schuyler argues, acts of discrimination and racial violence because they enabled the color line and, by nature, their organizations to persist. In essence, these organizations were just another “racket,” like the numbers pool, popular during the Harlem Renaissance era and beyond—a money-making scheme that further exploited the exploited and dispossessed, hence the metaphor of crabs in a barrel often attributed to the Black community. Therefore, while on the one hand, the “novel speaks to fantasies and anxieties about increasing urban industrialization, racial assimilation, and the reproduction of raced bodies in the black modernist moment” (Retman 1449), on the other, it also speaks to the ways in which social organizations pretending to support African-American equality and the opportunity at happiness—denied them as a result of the pervasive nature of the U.S. color line—capitalized on the color line itself to line their pockets and accumulate wealth, corrupted like the all-consuming U.S. capitalist system.

Though the emergence of new technologies potentially promises to increase equality and to eradicate the race question (what Schuyler elsewhere describes as the Caucasian problem), like with many modern technologies, the results are different than anticipated. Given the deep-seated nature of racism and “the complexities of the color line” as it exists and has existed historically across the United States, “Black-No-More, Inc. only thrusts the entire nation into [further] chaos and racial paranoia by making it impossible to distinguish ‘real’ whites from former African Americans who have ‘become’ white via the machine” (Joo 171). At the same time, there is an immense backlash from members of the white community who see the invention as an invasion of their property—that territory (social, economic, and political power) from which they had long excluded Blacks in an effort to maintain the racial hierarchy. In this sense, Black No More lives out the fantasy of D. W. Griffith’s 1915 film, The Birth of a Nation, which saw Black senators of the post-Emancipation South immediately pass pro-miscegenation legislation and radically uproot society. Just like in response to the film, the success of Dr. Crookman’s invention sparks a rise in membership in the satirized KKK. In both instances, the color line struggles to reinforce itself, supported by the champions of racial division and Jim Crow, who perceive Blackness as an inferior and contemptible thing. The chaos is a sign of the fundamental destabilization of society as they knew it and the mass hysteria, among whites and Blacks alike, is emblematic of their inability to adjust.

How, then, does Schuyler adhere to the tenet that Afrofuturist works should push to depict a more positive future for Blacks—that counter-future too often masked due to the ramifications of racism, discrimination, and cultural oppression? In truth, George Schuyler long contended that “[c]ontrary to the pundits on the Negro (or Caucasian!) problem who bewail the American racial facts of life, most of the colored brethren do not go about perpetually enveloped in gloom and despair” (BaC 1), just as he argues within the novel that there are no fundamental differences that distinguish whites from Blacks in U.S. society—realities that his core characters, white and Black alike, come to realize at the end of the text. Here Schuyler finally depicts the disappearance of the color line—at least for the characters of Matthew Fisher, the former Imperial Grand Wizard, and Fisher’s wife—critiquing the novel’s past as artificial (in its misbelief about totally eradicating the race problem) in clear contradiction to the closing image of Blacks and whites, Klansmen and their mixed race grandchild smiling on the beaches of Cannes.

In Black No More, the positive future that Schuyler envisions is not as widespread as the chaos that ensues after Crookman’s invention begins to radically change the U.S. racial landscape. At the end of the novel, the racial and socioeconomic hierarchy is restored, evident when Schuyler writes, “What was the world coming to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites? Many people in
the upper class began to look askance at their very pale complexions. If it were true that extreme whiteness was evidence of the possession of Negro blood, of having once been a member of a pariah class, then surely it were well not to be so white!” (BNM 178). Thus, it seems that, at least for the most part, the past and future coincide. But this is not in fact the case, for the central characters of the novel and their understandings of race are inherently transformed. Although the masses are virtually unaffected, what this likely means is that those individuals live in a different history—a point that only reaffirms the importance of recognizing a multiplicity of histories in Afrofuturist works, for the experiences that Matthew Fisher has would undoubtedly have been lost in the dominant History of those events.

“\textbf{I Felt Part of the Human World}”: White-to-Black Racial Reassignment and the “Afro-Diasporic Projection” of Jess Row’s \textit{Your Face in Mine}

Though fundamentally similar in their fictional approach and engagement with the concept of racial reassignment surgery, Jess Row’s \textit{Your Face in Mine} operates with a different vision than we see in \textit{Black No More}, not only because it is a white-authored text but also because it aims to disrupt what Row terms, “white dreamtime”—that psychosocial space for whites “where there are no blacks,…[a fantasy in which] they don’t see themselves occupying a certain racial position or identity” (Schulman 46). In the world that Row creates, technological advancement has enabled individuals to select their preferred racial identity, challenging the myth of race as biologically determined and highlighting the reality that race is a social construct determined by how individual people have been taught to read race in the world. Here technology is not the means by which the constraints of racism are erased and through which the once pervasive color line disappears, as Schuyler explores; rather, it becomes the tool by which whiteness, Blackness, and other racial identities intersect so that 1) those with a kind of racial dysphoria can carve out a space for themselves in the world and in a body that matches how they see their true and ideal selves and 2) a new level of cultural understanding across the races can be achieved.

To integrate these ideas into his work, Row centers his novel on the once white and Jewish character of Martin, who has undergone racial reassignment surgery to pass as African American\textsuperscript{1} and is determined to bring this technology on a broader scale to the rest of the world. From the very beginning of the text, the narrator acknowledges the overarching stigma associated with racial reassignment with references to the history “on passing, on Michael Jackson, on Jewish nose jobs, on eyelid surgery in Korea—more or less what one would expect”—all actions that have resulted in “outrcy;…public discussion” (Row 25). Continuing, the narrator now characterizes his old friend Martin as “a little unhinged, maybe. Mildly delusional. Or living in some alternate universe,

\textsuperscript{1} Row’s \textit{Your Face in Mine} immediately draws parallels to John Howard Griffin’s text \textit{Black Like Me}—a non-fiction text detailing Griffin’s journey to the Jim Crow South to explore the tense racial climate and discrimination against the African-American community. Griffin’s transformation, in contrast, is temporary, having taken medication and resting beneath sun lamps to alter the color of his skin. Passing here becomes much more of “an unconscious journey to self-knowledge, a way of discovering the meanings of his own white racial identity and his own implication in the system of oppression he sets out to expose” (Ginsberg 9). This is far different from what Row attempts with \textit{Your Face in Mine}, not only because the transformation that Martin undergoes is permanent but also because he sees himself as Black. An analysis of intersections between these two works and Grace Halsell’s \textit{Soul Sister}—the story of a white woman who altered the color of her skin to explore Black America—would yield invaluable insight into the ways in which white authors have conceptualized racial passing and the future of race, especially since passing has historically been a phenomenon explored primarily in Black-authored texts.
aesthetically, intellectually. It’s a great question mark” (25-26). Together, these statements not only reveal the negative perception of racial reassignment and the culture of passing in a global context but the difficulty of advancing this technology on a grander stage. To bring about the vision that Martin has of a world in which people can overcome their racial dysmorphia—a central issue he sees as a source of personal and public tension in the twenty-first century—he would have to go about reversing the stigma, of redefining deep-seated notions about race, of proposing “some alternate universe, aesthetically, intellectually” (Ibid) that others could embrace.

For Martin, whiteness does not necessarily hold a negative connection but is rather linked with a kind of invisibility similar to that that Max Disher feels as a Black man in Schuyler’s Black No More. Here Row writes, “I wasn’t a curiosity. I was a non-entity. I was invisible” (111)—a feeling only erased when he enters an alternate Black world two or three times a week for dinner at a friend’s home. There, he declares, “It wasn’t just that I was happy. It was that I felt human, as if for the first time….I felt part of the human world. And when Willie told me it was okay, because I would turn black one day, too, I wanted to believe him. Part of me did” (114). Unlike in Black No More, where whiteness is property, in Your Face in Mine, Blackness is a cherished physical and psychosocial space for the protagonist who feels a kind of dehumanization or lack of humanity as a white Jewish boy. Still, in this context, “[t]he idea of White-to-Black passing seems [rather] paradoxical—even oxymoronic—given the current disparities, challenges, and crises that vex Black lives daily” (Broady, Todd, and Darity 3). But what Row is doing, as Elia calls for, is the “rewriting [of] the history of the past” (84) in order to highlight the untold stories and voices, thus calling attention to the joyous parts of the African-American cultural experience hidden too often beneath tales of oppression and despair.

Broady, Todd, and Darity—in exploring the phenomenon of White-to-Black passing from a historical perspective—offer a valuable framework, that of fictive kinship, for understanding how the act of repositioning oneself along racial lines operates in the world. As they describe it, “[f]ictive kinship refers to connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships which serve as integral components of cultural networks” (3). While this dynamic often occurs intraracially, it also occurs when one engages in the act of racial passing. To explore this idea, the authors use the example of Rachel Dolezal, who controversially used makeup and hair extensions in an effort to alter her physical appearance and pass as a member of the African-American community (12). During her life, Dolezal was accused of not only cultural appropriation but also “replac[ing] gaps in her life story with self-constructed memories of a Black life, family, and upbringing” (12), all of which were exposed in 2015 when her parents outed her as white.2

This notion of fictive kinship is directly applicable to Your Face in Mine and is therefore a means of probing the art of race-making in the protagonist’s life. On the hand, it manifests in the relationship that Martin forges with the character of Willie—two friends of different races whose socioeconomic experiences are parallel, enabling them to form a fictive kinship during Martin’s formative years that inherently shapes his perception of race. On the other hand, like with Dolezal,

2 Since then, Dolezal has had a number of media appearances, legally changed her named to Nkechi Amare Diallo, and also published a memoir—In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World—that explores how she came to identify as Black. These acts, all part of Dolezal’s attempts at race-making, can be described as a kind of commodification of Blackness. Though this falls outside of the scope of the immediate study, there are direct parallels to Martin’s experience in Your Face in Mine, as he intends to go public about his racial transformation in order to better sell this new technology and increase access to racial reassignment for people across the globe.
the decision to cross racial lines entails the development of a new history and, by nature, the erasure of at least part of Martin’s immediate past. As Row writes, “I returned to the United States with an altered passport and have since presented myself as the child of adoptive white parents, now dead, with no information about my biological roots. This is the story that everyone around me—my wife, my intimate friends, my pastor—takes at face value” (41). In constructing this new identity for himself, Martin Wilkinson simultaneously engages in erasure of his past, enabling Row to “explore the ways people try to escape their racial identities” and to “investigate their desire for racial reconciliation,” even if that reconciliation is not with the world but within the self (Lee 2). What Row highlights here through the character of Martin is the malleability of racial identity and the processes by which racial integration occurs—something less developed in Schuyler’s text.

Like *Black No More*, *Your Face in Mine* attempts to expand beyond an individual story of racial passing to a sociopolitical critique, addressing the racial divide in the United States and across the globe and the potentialities for bridging that divide. As Felicia R. Lee asserts in a 2014 review of the book, “If a dramatic fix is needed to bring people together or to help them with their racial demons, then Martin may be on to something” (2). Because the color line has contributed to the fracturing of society and the isolation of communities racially and ideologically, this is the fictive present that Afrofuturist works ultimately attempt to correct. By having Martin undergo the racial reassignment surgery and encourage the spread of such technologies to allow others to do the same, Row envisions a future in which race is no longer simply a prescribed identity—static and limiting—but rather a choice, an ascribed identity (at least for those with the money to absorb the costs). Racial reassignment then opens the possibility for a more widespread integration—ideological miscegenation through the fusion of cultural horizons—of “the most radical kind,” “the kind you can’t undo” (qtd in Lee 2).

This final detail is of the utmost importance to *Your Face in Mine* because the difficult task of integration and healing the racial fractures of society has often been undone through an active campaign to restore the racial order and disinvestment in the initiatives that have resulted in some progress toward long-standing change. Jim Crow is a clear example, undoing the work of the Reconstruction era and restoring the racial hierarchy to keep Blacks in their “place.” In the novel, the permanence of this change—in contradistinction, for example, to the temporary transformation with makeup and heating lamps we see in John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me*—is therefore paramount in ensuring a future that does not revert back to its past racist tendencies and the kinds of cultural divisiveness that only further fractures a society already fractured both politically and socioeconomically. Dr. Silpasuvan, the inventor of the novel’s racial reassignment procedures, outlines the logic behind this, declaring, “[F]rom a practical point of view, as the world becomes more and more interrelated and natural and geographical barriers less substantial, the desire for these procedures will doubtless become more and more acute in the next century” (Row 265); this, the counter-future that Row envisages throughout the text, is perhaps the most important step toward a new global perspective that necessarily decentralizes the political emphasis on race.

In Afrofuturist works, “[B]lack artistic truth reveals essentially a failure in the underlying structures of white Western civilization and a proposal to set right those destructive social and political forces in nature,” argues Gilbert Muller (qtd in Tal 67). To some extent, this is reflected in *Your Face in Mine* in the actions that Martin takes to rectify the societal disunity that has caused such harm to communities of color nationwide. In advocating the further development of racial reassignment technologies as a tool through which to increase unity and cultural understanding, he offers that clear near-future or counter-future proposal for the redevelopment of society as a means of “[s]et[ting] right those destructive social and political forces” (Ibid). This is perhaps the
allure of fiction in tackling issues of race, culture, politics, and identity, for it ultimately enables the author “to intervene in the readers’ assumptions by creating a world in which standards are different” (Nelson 101)—something unachievable in mimetic fiction so deeply concerned with the past and how it shaped the present day. As Nalo Hopkinson notes in his interview with Alondra Nelson, editor of the Afrofuturism special issue of Social Text, the author “can blatantly show what values the characters in the story are trying to live out by making them actual, by exaggerating them into the realm of the fantastical, so that the consequences conversely become so real that they are tangible” (Ibid). This is seen in both Black No More and Your Face in Mine, for the central characters delve headfirst into the fantastical as they confront and undermine the racial order and usher in a counter-future where the impossible becomes a distinct possibility.

Speaking, then, of the novel as the vehicle through which that message is communicated and the impossible is made real, Row states his belief that “novels—or any art form—can have a powerful impact on people’s perceptions of race, particularly if they draw attention to the absurd inconsistencies and stereotypes we all carry around with us and don’t want to think about,” this in contrast to “preachy political rhetoric” (Schulman 46) that only expands the divide between the intelligentsia and the masses most deeply affected by the issues such texts can raise. For that core reason, he suggests that “there’s room for art that approaches these issues from the side—as satire, as parody, or as a kind of outlandish speculative proposition. This is a great time to be producing art that makes people uncomfortable” (Ibid). It is that discomforting focus—vital to works that engage Afrofuturist sensibilities—that makes these works so effective in stimulating conversation and debate, for they do not shy away from taboo topics like miscegenation, racial reassignment, and cultural appropriation that remain contentious in the world today. Rather, these texts use that discomfort as a way to signify exactly the kinds of topics that should be addressed.

In the end, the counter-future that Martin proposes in Your Face in Mine is disrupted just as it is in Black No More. The impossible becomes possible only for a moment before the world intervenes and the racial order is somehow restored or the forces that aim to change that are sadly counteracted. In this case, Dr. Silpasuvan is killed, taking his trade secrets along with him and forcing the world to find other avenues of building increased cultural understanding than the racial reassignment procedures that he worked tirelessly to create. The fact that both novels highlight a temporal counter-future is therefore significant, especially given the radical nature of the societal transformation that these authors propose. It is almost as if they recognize that the world is not ready yet, that such ideas can only be explored in the crucible of fiction where alternate histories can persist.

Counter-Future as Present Reality: The Insights of Black No More and Your Face in Mine in a Modern Context

Ultimately, the future that Schuyler and Row both envision in their novels is the reality of the present day. White women have altered the color of their skin and the shapes of their bodies to adopt more Afrocentric features—a phenomenon now known as blackfishing—which brings along with it important conversations about cultural appropriation and exploitation of Black bodies for fame and economic benefit. This, Amira Rasool acknowledges in her 2018 article, “Some White Influencers are Being Accused of ‘Blackfishing,’ or Using Makeup to Appear Black.” Establishing a link between blackfishing today and the minstrel tradition, she asserts that this “can be seen as a modernized form of blackface,” for Rasool asserts that it is not only a false imitation of Blackness but also one aimed at increasing the national profiles of its participants after centuries spent trying to redress the notion of Blackness as a contemptible thing. Such individuals, participating in a kind of racial androgyny and the commodification of Blackness, rely on the idea of fictive kinship and
the ways in which the public has been taught to read race to make a successful transition, however
temporary—perhaps just a single Instagram post or an entire photoshoot that remains in the global
cultural imagination. This rewriting of history has no clear lesson, no sociocultural critique unlike
Row and Schuyler’s texts, hence the widespread backlash from people of color online and the
overarching importance of Afrofuturist texts in envisioning counter-futures to this, our present
reality.

At the same time, skin whitening creams and depigmentation procedures are now available
like never before, the market expected to reach a global valuation of twenty-four billion dollars by
the year 2027, reaching a compound annual growth rate of 6.1 percent (“Skin Lightening”) due to
rising insecurity over physical appearance, colorism, and the lingering stigmas of race. Such skin
lightening products, despite the health risks, allow African Americans and other people of color to
alter the complexion of their skin to potentially achieve newfound social and economic opportunity
like the characters depicted in Row and Schuyler’s works. While the reasoning for these physical
transformations is not necessarily the same—for Jim Crow, at least in theory, has come to an end—
the ramifications are consistent: the destabilizing (temporary or not, it remains to be seen) of soci-
ety and the resurgence of conversations about cultural appropriation and the property of race.
What, then, can we take from works such as Black No More and Your Face in Mine in our effort
to better understand the dilemmas that we now face regarding race in the twenty-first century and
beyond? How can we use the lessons that Schuyler and Row communicate to ensure that we do
not delve deeper into the chaos of a world so heavily consumed by race?

Black No More presents a nearly raceless world in which Blackness, for the most part, no
longer exists; yet, in that sameness, the racial divide still remains, if not all the more prevalent and
concerning than before. It is clear that the eradication of race is not the solution to the troubles that
plague American society. After all, as Schuyler proclaims in his autobiography, entitled Black and
Conservative, “[t]he ability to conserve, consolidate, and change when expedient is the hallmark
of individual and group intelligence. It is why the Negro will always be here” (2)—a constant
contributing factor to the multicultural fabric of this United States. In Your Face in Mine, Jess Row
presents a world filled with the beauty of racial difference; yet, in that diversity, a racial divide
also persists where some hold stereotypical ethnic notions about one another and a limited cultural
understanding leaves some feeling displaced and dispossessed. Racial reassignment for the masses,
however, proves unreasonable as a solution to the “isolation and stigmatization” (Row 264) that is
evident in the world, so another solution—far less extreme—is needed to affect change.

What we see, in the end, is that by engaging some of the core values of Afrofuturism (such
as exaggeration, revision of the historical past, and the presentation of a counter-future not realized
in the world today), these authors are able to advance a political and sociocultural message through
their texts about race relations and the strategies for building a more unified world. While acts
such as miscegenation and complete racial assimilation are clearly not the answer, a convergence
of diverse perspectives gets us one step closer to resolving the color line that plagues American
society. And while worldwide racial reassignment proves unviable, stepping into another’s shoes
to increase our cultural competency is perhaps one solution to improving race relations in a frac-
tured world. Neither solution is perfect and both require a considerable amount of work from peo-
ple in society, assuming they are even willing to set aside the prejudices and the underlying
imperialisms they operate with each day, but they are actions that can get us to that more positive
future Afrofuturism hopes to examine and that each novel envisions by the end.
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INTRUDER ALERT

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JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

LEAH SMITH, THE ACTIVIST ARTIST
A History of Black People¹

Donald Vincent

we be the kings and queens
of ancient cities,

Pythagoras of pharaohs’ pyramids
or reaping sword swingers
following the drinking gourds.

we be the soul of the blues—

can’t sleep at night,
can’t eat a bite
because the nation we love,
she don’t treat us right.

we be a most beautiful black,
salmon-pink colored skies
in the mind of the blind.

¹ after Jean Michel-Basquiat’s painting
The Evolution of the Simpleminded Negro
Donald Vincent

A history never told
Privileged folk always feel guilty
Guilty are the underrepresented
Guilty are the misrepresented
Slanging spoken words on the back of buses
In a country with no justice
  In a country with no justice
  In a country with no justice

(This record skips on repeat)

In a country that
Must be concussed
To conceive these visions
Since we don’t believe in dreams
Especially those of King
  We twitter-activism and protest
  Evoking spirits of Malcolm X

Hopped off slave ships
Out of the cotton fields
In debt to the government
Making my payments
Can't forget to pay rent
Push packs to get paid
  Push packs just to save
  Push packs until the grave.

Became my own master
Always been royalty
My skin is an art gallery
Painted with crucifixes
To save me
  From lynchings as a consequence
  Of too much Melanin in my pigment

The ropes turn into cuffs
Cuffs are the court
Courts aren't a sport
  The only history
  You can know is your own

Everything that glitters
Is not gold
   Everything black
   Is not evil.

If I am gunned down
The universities will say,
I never earned, never learned
   Say I stole my degree(s)
     (Both of them)

If I’m gunned down
or shot unjustly please
post all of the photos
   I’ve taken with white women
     For they shall start the revolution.

Don’t forget the one(s)
With Obama
From the Wax Museum
Or his cardboard cutout quoting
His support of the troops
To show I love(d) my country
   Can they love me back
     At least half as much
Interview with Achal Prabhala Regarding the Formation of Planetbinya.org Archive

Achal Prabhala is a researcher and writer based in Bangalore, India. Although Prabhala is known for his advocacy and research on intellectual property rights and medicine, his work—resurrecting, championing, and writing about issues related to Black and Brown people throughout the diaspora—has appeared in *Africa is a Country*, *Bidoun*, and *The Caravan*.

Achal and I were among a group of Binya’s close friends who banded to support him throughout his various health challenges. Upon his transitioning, Achal shared with the group the link to planetbinya.org, a digital archive of the work of Binyavanga Wainaina for whom this first issue is dedicated. Binya knew of and saw the archive before his transition on May 21, 2019. This two-part interview reviews the genesis of the archive. Part one details the genesis and formation of the archive.

1. **How did the archive come to be?** The archive was setup in 2017. We (Transition, Chimurenga, Kwani founders) worked together on an aborted project in 2005 or 2006. We were all attending Kwani Litfest in Nairobi. Friends came from Cambridge, South Africa, all these places around the world in the pre-social media era. Even with fairly good internet access, few had access to things on the internet because of pay walls, and because many magazines existed only in print. It was tough for Kwani to be distributed. It was tough for all of us. We decided as a collective to digitize and run all our magazines together on a free, open, internet platform. We setup the project, made some headway, and then it just fell apart. We really wanted to get writers to reach new audiences and gain awareness of each others’ work. I felt as though many writers at the time weren’t getting the attention they deserved because the logic of the internet was relegating them to being merely local. Planetbinya.org grew out of this effort. Binya saw the archive, since it went up at in 2017, and so he had several lucid years where could appreciate it.

2. **Why an archive?** I live in India, and I work there, as well as in South Africa and Brazil. When I went to South Africa for a meeting in 2016, Binya was there, and he was loving it. In South Africa, Binya could be himself. I like Johannesburg for the same reason; it’s a place where you can be free, and be the fullest possible version of yourself, around all kinds of creative and innovative people, and you can do all this in a context that is black; which is to say, you don’t have to be in the US or Europe to experience this freedom. Binya, of course, had changed as a result of the stroke. He was impatient to live the life he had always wanted. He wanted to stay and get a job, and to do that, he needed a visa to live in South Africa. Getting any kind of visa to enter South Africa is hard, so I thought perhaps we should try and get him a university job. For all kinds of sordid reasons, including that the
South African literary community is staid and insular, we thought the country needed to be reminded of who Binya was so we ran this super well-attended event in 2017. I set up the archive at this time as a companion to the event. It was purely practical: it was a means of getting him a job in South Africa.

3. **What is the archive?** It isn’t the sum of his life because his life was so much more than his work, and Binya was of course was this really smart, intelligent, chaotic guy. But, still, I think of the archive as reflecting his best self. Our relationship had gone awry in a number of different ways, and my respect for him came surging back during the creation of the archive because his work is magnificent. I was strangely comforted by his work. Here was the character I met in 2004—the friend I could talk to about anything on the planet. I enjoy reading the archive even now; when I miss him, which is often, I read him, and it’s a form of therapy.[1]

4. **What was the process of creating the archive?** It took quite a long time. Binya’s output was prodigious, but he did not archive himself I was helped by the fact that I had a fairly good memory of where he had written. I had a good memory of reading his columns in the Mail and Guardian, for instance, even though they are more or less drowned in the sea of the internet. You know how it is where things can exist on decently trafficked websites but because of the way the website indexes articles, they are actually very hard to come upon, unless you know exactly what you are looking for.

There were instances where Binya had written for places which are behind a paywall. Harper’s was one of them. Other essays were behind thick academic gates. I begged, borrowed and stole; I asked friends to get me copies of articles that I had no access to.

I was doing this on the side with the rest of my life. I worked on it in bits and pieces over 3 or 4 months. After the initial spurt, it became an ongoing project, where I would add one or two new pieces every month. After his death many people wrote to me, pointing me to something I had left out. I’m grateful. The Binya archive is always rebuilding itself, much in the same way as Binya was rebuilding himself in the final years of his life.

If you have a suggestion for the archive, you can email Achal at aprabhala@gmail.com.
BACK TO THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT 49

RICK BANKS
Toward a Redefinition of Afrofuturism and the Black Fantastic--A Postscript

Christopher Allen Varlack

This ends the debut issue of Third Stone, dedicated to Binyavanga Wainaina—Kenyan author and recipient of the 2002 Caine Prize for African Writing. In his 2006 essay, “How to Write about Africa,”1 published in Granta Magazine, Wainaina interrogates the problematic ways that Africa has been treated in literature and cultural discourse across time, described, for instance, as “hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving….Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed.” In these words, Wainaina confronts the longstanding stereotypical notions about Africa that predate texts such as Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and the ways in which those stereotypes have so heavily infiltrated the global cultural imagination, leaving little to no space for historically and culturally accurate representations of the diverse peoples who live on the continent. This, for Wainaina, is a fundamental obstacle that needs to be addressed—a stumbling block that inhibited readers from understanding the truths about Africa and its peoples outside of erroneous depictions of “naked warriors, loyal servants, diviners and seers, ancient wise men living in hermitic splendor. Or corrupt politicians, inept polygamous travel-guides, and prostitutes you have slept with.” Personally, Wainaina worked to create and champion the work of other creators whose work existed not in conversation with this trope, not as some counter narrative, but as a narrative standing tall and proud on its own. His work, described by many, as Afrofuturist in its mission therefore aimed at challenging this flawed depiction of the African past and present and is therefore an inspiration as we probe the very notion of Afrofuturism and how it manifests in different forms of media today.

The first piece, an interview by Seretha D. Williams with Corey Washington, explores the role that musician Jimi Hendrix played within music history and how he has become a key figure of Afrofuturism today. As Washington declares, his “whole swagger is drenched in Afrofuturism,” from his sci-fi inspired lyrics to his wardrobe to his manipulation of sound and technical equipment to thrill audiences in concert halls and venues nationwide. Like Wainaina, Jimi Hendrix challenged daily the status quo of his field, ultimately ushering in a new generation of music directly inspired by the advancements that he made as a musician of the twentieth century. As Dust notes in its short piece, “Afrofuturism: Jimi Hendrix,” “Like Sun Ra before him, Hendrix wrote songs about interstellar travel, even including alien characters in songs like ‘Up From The Skies’ and ‘Third Stone From The Sun,’ which was inspired by George R. Stewart’s post-apocalyptic science fiction novel, Earth Abides.” Furthermore, Hendrix’s overwhelming “infatuation with science fiction, and his commitment to technological (and psychedelic) experimentation, pushed him to make his guitar sound like anything but.” By envisioning a form of art that transcends the present for an audience

1 In his follow-up work, “How to Write about Africa II,” Wainaina discusses his process of creating this groundbreaking essay, which began as an E-mail rant in response to the initial Africa issue published by Granta—one he describes as “populated by every literary bogeyman that any African has ever known.” Concerned that the issue advanced the same stereotypes while excluding the African peoples from the conversation, Wainaina drafted the E-mail, which inspired Granta to publish a new Africa issue including Wainaina’s thoughts (the E-mail serving as the foundation). While “How to Write about Africa” is an important work, one that inspires in part our thinking about Afrofuturism as an artistic and critical lens, it is also important to recognize that, according to Wainaina’s sequel, it was “a piss-job, a venting of steam” that “was never supposed to see the light of day.”
of listeners of his day and age, Hendrix manipulated time and space in a way that is key to Afrofuturist endeavors.

Following this is what artist and cultural critic Nettrice Gaskins terms *algorhythms*, which work to merge “new technologies and computation with vernacular, which is visual, aural, [and] text-based” (“About This Work”) to create both strong and powerful images of Blackness in motion, intersecting past, present, and future—a key aspect of Afrofuturism as we define it today. In “Afro Array,” for instance, Gaskins depicts the wonderings of the Black woman, her thoughts and her identity draped in a multiplicity of colors that reflect the variations of Blackness and the uniqueness of the African-American soul. Similarly, “Fire Writer” gives life to the words and the lyrics of the African-American artist. One can feel the tom-tom of jazz reverberating from every word that echoes from the margins of the image; they burn their mark upon the audience as the words themselves envelop the fire writer in a burst of mounting flames. “Slydoscope” applies then kaleidoscopic lens to the portrayal of the Black male figure, both dissecting and interweaving, his piercing eyes probing the racial landscape of a world so often complicated and far too difficult to understand. Together, these pieces are a representation of not only the present but also the counte-futures merged within Afrofuturist art, for Gaskins is not just concerned with this present moment but with the futures that we are building, not just through the telling of our stories and the reclaiming of our tales but through artistic production--“techno-vernacular creativity” in and of itself (“Biography”).

Like Wainaina, Cheryl R. Hopson in her poems, “On Origins” and “#hertoo” challenges the troubling history of the Black experience, though focused instead on the United States around the antebellum period when slaves had to maneuver the Underground Railroad to escape the throes of slavery. In “On Origins,” Hopson imagines herself as a stop along this daunting journey—“what was, for all intents and purposes, / a nightmare” (ll. 10-11) for her and those who were seeking to escape. Here Hopson highlights the struggle across generations to “reverse the curse, / end it” (ll. 19-20)—a collective action aimed at changing a society that saw Blackness as a contemptible thing and the African-American people as little more than chattel to build and sustain their economy. Her second poem, “#hertoo,” incorporates the activist side of Afrofuturist work, confronting head-first those who harm young girls of all races, physically, sexually, and emotionally. Her closing line, “Get ready” (l. 12) warns them of the impending wrath that they will face for their actions—a core impulse in many Afrofuturist works like George Schuyler’s *Black Empire* and other works of “black militant near-future fiction” (Tal p. 65).

In his critical article, “Racial Reassignment Surgery and the Dissolution of the Color Line: Afrofuturist Satire in George Schuyler’s *Black No More* and Jess Row’s *Your Face in Mine*,” Christopher Allen Varlack builds upon this Afrofuturist vision, exploring the ways in which Schuyler and Row alike not only probe the theory of assimilation as a solution to the color line but also explore the counter-futures too often stamped out under the feet of U.S. cultural oppression. His is interested, for instance, in the ways in which the crucible of fiction can be used to “create[,] a world in which standard are different” or to “show what values the characters in the story are trying to live out by making them actual, by exaggerating them into the realm of the fantastical, so that the consequences conversely become so real that they are tangible” (Nelson p. 101). For both of these authors, elements of Afrofuturism enable them to put forth a vision of a world in which race is a choice, whether that possibility is positive or not, in order to explore what the world looks like with presumably less of an emphasis on race (if such a potentiality is even possible)--issues that reflect our present reality in this time of skin lightening creams, plastic surgery, and black-fishing.
In his paintings, artist Abdi Farah envisions the critical role that former president Barack Obama would play in shaping and reshaping the political and cultural landscape. Looking toward the future, in “Intruder Alert” and “Boldly Go,” Farah presents imagery of the Black Fantastic, depicting himself running alongside Obama, weapons in hand, prepared to face some unknown intruder in space. Here Farah presents not only Obama as the hero figure but also himself—a direct metamorphosis for the Black male figure who was traditionally cast as the Brute Negro and other erroneous stereotypes that limited his reception in the U.S. cultural imagination. At the same time, he also highlights the migratory impulse in the Black condition, willing to travel to lands unknown in search of independence, power, opportunity, and more. This theme is also present in his piece, “Afronaut.” Having already traversed new frontiers as the first African-American president of the United States, Obama looks toward overcoming new heights. The explorers in these images, however, have no supernatural powers that enable them to overcome the obstacles that have hindered people of color for far too long; they are equipped solely with wit, determination, and their God-given talents to carve out a corner of the world.

Like Farah’s work and much Afrofuturist music, TheActivistArtist’s “Journey to the Center of the Universe” puts its emphasis on the voyage across time and the evolution of self that occurs along the way. In the song, she declares, “Welcome to my fantastic voyage. I’m gonna take you on a ride. We’re going from heartbreak to triumph to the glory in my soul.” From the very beginning, we see the transformation from the pain of the immediate historical moment to the triumph of the counter-future that she has envisioned—one not trampled upon by the political and cultural oppression of the present day. In the process, TheActivistArtist responds to a core question that Mark Dery asks in his 1994 essay, “Black to the Future”: “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?” (p. 180). As we see within “Journey to the Center of the Universe,” the answer to this question is a resounding yes, for the heartbreak of the past is not defining nor limiting for the very peoples joining her along this journey. The music itself, the medium for envisioning this counter-future, then enables her to not only engineer our own “collective fantasies” (Dery p. 180) but also to travel “to the glory in my soul” (TheActivistArtist).

As this issue works to expand our insight into Afrofuturism not only through the lens of its leading figures but also across different media, the poetic sensibilities of Donald Vincent, known also as Mr. Hip, enable us to trace how Afrofuturism works its way into the poetic voice as a vision of the diaspora and as a sociocultural critique of the obstacles to Black advancement. In his work, “A History of Black People,” Vincent calls attention to the blindness of society that denies the beauty of Blackness and the reality that “we be the kings and queens / of ancient cities” (ll. 1-2)—images reminiscent of the words of Langston Hughes in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Here Vincent envisions Black peoples in multiple forms: as “kings and queens (l. 1), as “the soul of the blues” (l. 6), and as “a most beautiful black” (l. 11). He contrasts this with the abuse experienced in a “nation we love” but that “don’t treat us right” (ll. 9-10)—a theme also present in his second work, “The Evolution of the Simpleminded Negro,” presented in both recording and text. The same old tale repeats on this record of history, a country that shows no love to a people who love it dearly and who are dedicated to bringing about its promise of democracy. Channeling Du Bois’ “Returning Soldiers,” Vincent writes in a voice uniquely his own but also rooted in a deep history of struggle; it is a record of that struggle and how that has contributed to the evolution of a people once disparaged for the color of their skin.
The next piece explores the Binyavanga Wainaina archives available at planetbinya.org, enabling us to revisit the contributions of Wainaina to the critical conversations this issue hopes to unearth as well as to cultural discourse on the issues of which he was highly concerned during his lifetime. The archive offers a massive catalogue of the writings that he produced across time as well as the videos, talks, and conversations in which he was an active participant. It includes pieces such as his 2007 “Prepare for the African Writing Revolution” in which Wainaina discusses the voices of Nigerian writers that were beginning to transform the literary landscape with the “hope to build, in an organic and useful way, a community of people who can interact online, read, write and make chemistry happen.” In her interview with Achal Prabhala, developer of the archive, Myrtle Jones discovered that the very creation of the archive emanated from the tenets Third Stone aims to demonstrate. Prabhala shared that the archive was the result of an aborted 2006 effort of a larger collective of journals such as Transition, Kwani?, and Chimurenga to digitize their content. Recognizing that, at the time, limited access kept their writers local, their goal was the creation of a platform for writers to reach the full audience that they deserved, pre-social media, just as Wainaina himself envisioned.

The fusion of artistic forms and the interstitching of past, present, and future common in Afrofuturists works then work their way into the photography of Rick Banks—an Atlanta-based photographer. His first piece, “Back to the Future,” interpolates the African or African-American body with sculptural masks in an effort to depict the journey across time and space, back and forth simultaneously through the African future and past. A deep blue light echoes from the center—a contrast to his other images where abstract forms and manifestations of the human body morph in an almost cosmic explosion that speaks to the dynamism of the African and African-American spirit, never static but in a constant state of becoming, of being transformed. These abstract pieces, set against a background of blackness, illustrate how Blackness is the fusion of colors—a multiplicity of unique identities and experiences—thus challenging the myopic view of Blackness and Black cultures that has historically framed the cultural imagination. Like Wainaina, Banks ultimately challenges that myopic vision by revealing a peoples and culture in dynamic flux—the story too often untold that Afrofuturist works attempt to tell.

Together, through their unique insights, these works define and redefine our understanding of Afrofuturism as a medium of artistic and cultural expression but also as a lens through which we can better understand past, present, and future experiences endured by people across the diaspora. They show the potential for art to transform and transmogrify a painful past into futures created by Blacks for Blacks--a core part of Third Stone’s mission, as Myrtle Jones declares in this issue’s Editor’s Corner. And in the process, they highlight ways in which we can fight back, recreate, love, resist, and heal, all while leaving a legacy of art (in all its forms) that can inspire future generations to do the same. And so, this ends the inaugural issue of Third Stone--the start of our own inquiry and journey. We look forward to the future conversations that this journal will unearth along the way.

References
Call for Submissions: *Third Stone*
Art as Liberation in the Black Fantastic

Submissions Due on November 30, 2019

Across the African diaspora, art was a form of expression and liberation at times of widespread cultural oppression, enabling artists of color to resist the tradition of silencing while preserving their histories, traditions, and more in ways that could be passed down intergenerationally. While much art worked to fulfill a political purpose by pushing for equality and liberty in oppressive cultures, other works aimed at achieving liberation by way of celebrating Black cultural forms, from the cutting-edge music of Erykah Badu to that of Janelle Monae. Eager to explore art as liberation in the Black fantastic, *Third Stone* solicits submissions of art, music, creative writing, short films, scholarship, digital content, and more on the liberatory function of art inside and outside of U.S. borders.

**Scholarly Work**
In addition to accepting traditional articles, *Third Stone* is particularly interested in multimodal content and serving as a hub for Black digital humanities as we explore how art can serve to liberate peoples of color from oppressive climates and cultures across space and time. How do literature, art, music, and/or film break the chains that confine Black peoples, relegating them to a second-class status, if considered citizens at all? How do these modes of emancipatory expression celebrate Black talent as people of color work to carve out their place in a growing and increasingly complicated world? Interested contributors might consider addressing the following topics, though pieces (textual, sonic, or otherwise) are certainly welcome on a range of other considerations. Scholarly work should be no longer than eight thousand words, not including endnotes and references.

- Intersections of Black Studies and Digital Humanities in the Twenty-First Century
- The Black African Digital Diaspora—Mapping Black Histories and Black Futures
- Identifying Early Afrofuturists—New Approaches to Literature of the Harlem Renaissance Era
- The Space of the Imagination—Probing the Archives of Binyavanga Wainaina
- Interrogating Simultaneous Utopianisms—African Futures in the Art of Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum and Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga
- Music as Liberation—Afrofuturists in the Tradition of Jimi Hendrix
- From Sun Ra to Janelle Monae—Liberation in the Afrofuturist Musical Tradition
- Unapologetic Blackness—Diasporic Visions in Beyoncé and Other Contemporary Black Musicians
- The Tethered Explained—Jordan Peele’s *Us* through the Lens of the Black Fantastic
- *Black Panther* as the Black Fantastic—Visions of the African Diaspora in Black Hollywood, Past & Present
**Creative Work**

In our effort to honor the diverse modes of expression popularized throughout the African diaspora past and present, *Third Stone* values creative works for inclusion in each issue. This includes visual art, music, creative writing and more that engages the theme selected for that particular issue. How can we work to visualize the Black fantastic in artistic form? How can we shape our words and our music to explore the intersections of past, present, and future as we trace the Black experience at large?

- **Film:** One piece of no more than 10 minutes
- **Music:** One to three pieces
- **Poetry:** One to three pieces as a Microsoft Word or Rich Text file
- **Prose (Non-Fiction or Fiction):** One piece as a Microsoft Word or Rich Text file
- **Visual Art:** One to three pieces with 300 dpi resolution saved with no compression

For multimedia submissions, please write up a narrative abstract of no more than 250 words describing the submission. The narrative abstract will be published as a supporting document. Videos must be accompanied by a transcript. The corresponding transcripts and narrative abstracts will be copy edited for clarity and readability.

Multimedia should be submitted in one of the following formats:

- Flash/HTML5 Audio MP4a, mp3,
- Flash/HTML Video (flv, mp4, RTMP)
- QuickTime Audio (aac, aif, mid, midi, mov, wav)
- QuickTime Video (3g2, 3gp, mov, mpg, mpeg)
- RealAudio (ra, ram)
- RealVideo (ram, smi, smil)
- SWF format (swf)
- Windows Media Audio (wma)
- Windows Media Video (avi, wmv)
- WMV, AVI, MOV, MPEG, GIF
- Vimeo
- YouTube
- Other rich media

**Bibliographic Annotations**

*Third Stone* is also excited to build a comprehensive annotated bibliography of source material on the Black fantastic, including traditional print sources (books, magazines, journal articles, newspapers, and reviews) and digital media (audio, video, film, and websites). Entries should be approximately 750 to 1000 words in length, featuring a brief summary of the source, analysis of its significant concepts and/or themes, and a brief reflection on intersections with other source material with which the author is familiar. Entries will be vetted through the same process as articles so that contributors can be credited for each published entry to the annotated bibliography.

Interested contributors should view the Author Guidelines for *Third Stone.*

For inquiries, please contact *Third Stone* at 3rdstonejournal@gmail.com.
Contributors

Rick Banks, an Atlanta native, heard his calling at a very young age. His love of photography was born at the age of eight, after seeing a print develop in a tray. This intense photographic passion has afforded him opportunities that allowed him to work in various capacities in his professional photographic career. His artistic eye has been developed and sharpened by thirty plus years of experience in photography, advertising, and print design/production. His work has been published in books, magazines, catalogs, and news publications, and it has been used in marketing and promotional materials for various clients. Banks has exhibited his work at different venues and some of his images are part of the permanent art collection of the City of Atlanta. He has photographed giants of business and entertainment in addition to "just folk.” Before he opens his camera case, he opens his ears to ensure that he understands the needs of his client. His shooting style has ultimately been called "intense and detail-driven" at times and very relaxed at others. An open mind and a stylized eye are the most essential tools he utilizes in every shoot.

Abdi Farah began his art education at the George Washington Carver Center for Art and Technology in Towson, Maryland after his dreams of playing in the NBA were eclipsed by a greater passion to be the next Basquiat. Farah received his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 2009, graduating with honors. Farah has been fortunate to exhibit work across the country and internationally at institutions including the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Margulies Collection, the Institute for American Universities in Aix en Provence, France, and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, to name a few. He also highlighted a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Farah was a 2005 Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a recipient of the Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship through the Yale Norfolk School of Music and Art, and a 2017 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture participant. In 2018, Farah received his MFA in painting from Tulane University in New Orleans, where he continues to live and work. For more on his art, visit his website at http://www.abdifarah.com.

Dr. Nettrice R. Gaskins is an African American digital artist, academic, cultural critic, and advocate of STEAM fields. In her work, she explores "techno-vernacular creativity” and Afrofuturism. She has worked for several years in K-12 and post-secondary education, community media, and technology before receiving a doctorate in Digital Media from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2014. Gaskins has focused on the application of cultural art and technologies in STEAM learning for underrepresented ethnic groups in public schools in the United States and around the world. She has also worked as a teaching artist for the Boston 100K Artscience Innovation Prize and was a youth media/technology trainer for Adobe Youth Voices. She served as Board President of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture and was on the board of the Community Technology Centers Network (CTCNet). Dr. Gaskins has also received funding from the National Science Foundation for Advancing STEM Through Culturally Situated Arts-Based Learning. Gaskins provides expert advice on how to include people from underrepresented communities. For more on her art, visit her website at http://www.nettricegaskins.com.

Dr. Cheryl R. Hopson is an assistant professor professor of English and African American Studies at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. She received her PhD in English from the University of Kentucky in 2008 and specializes in twentieth century American and African Amer-
ican literature and culture as well as Black and Third Wave feminist autobiographical, philosophical, and life writing. In addition, Hopson is an essayist and poet. She has published essays on Zora Neale Hurston, Alice and Rebecca Walker, and Black Feminist sisterhood. Finishing Line Press published her chapbooks *Fragile* (2017) and *Black Notes* (2013). Additionally, Hopson’s poems can be found in the *Toronto Quarterly*, *Border Crossings*, and *Not Very Quiet*, in the anthology *Writing for Peace* (2017), and in other publications.

**Myrtle Jones**, a Chicago native residing in Harlem, is an assistant professor in Media Sciences at Rochester Institute of Technology. She teaches courses on the digital distribution of intellectual property, database publishing, and media law. She received MA’s from NYU’s Gallatin Division, focusing on Publishing Studies, and Teachers College in Anthropology and Education. She is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology at Columbia University. She also attended IESE’s Institute for Media Entertainment. Jones has been an information connoisseur since childhood, learning the Dewey Decimal System by heart working alongside her mother, a library clerk. She was the first online director of a suburban newspaper in New York in 2000. She started her career as a researcher at Harpo, Inc, where she was first exposed to FoxPro databases. She was a member of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and her poetry has been featured in *Nommo*. Her academic work on media entrepreneurs has been featured in the *International Journal of Media Management*. She researches the Black Elite in Harlem and she has performed her work at the Potter’s House in Washington, DC. Autoethnography and Performative Ethnography are just two of the many tools she uses to inject decoloniality into her scholarship and work.

**Leah, TheActivistArtist, Smith** is a community advocate, poet, and Neo-retro R&B musician in Augusta, GA. Committed to healing and self-awareness, Smith writes and performs music that raises awareness about mental illness and uses her platform to help her community navigate the ebbs and flows of love and loss. Her debut album, *Fire2Feelings*, was released in December 2018. She is a graduate of Augusta University.

**Dr. Christopher Allen Varlack** is a lecturer at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he teaches for the Individualized Study Program and the Honors College. He offers courses in graphic memoirs and novels of the African diaspora, African-American socio-political thought, civil rights literature, taboo and transgressive texts, and more. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine in 2010 and his doctorate in English from Morgan State University in 2016. In 2015, he served as editor for *Critical Insights: Harlem Renaissance* and in 2017, he served as editor for *Critical Insights: Civil Rights Literature, Past and Present*. Now, as co-managing editor of *Third Stone* and president of the Langston Hughes Society, he works to increase awareness of Black culture and the ways in which writers across the diaspora have affirm their own voices and control their own narratives. For more on his work, visit his website at [http://www.christopherallenvarlack.com](http://www.christopherallenvarlack.com).

**Donald Vincent**, also known as Mr. Hip, earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College and a BA in Writing and Public Relations from Loyola University Maryland. He is a poet, educator, recording artist, and founder of le pamplemuse™, a content development platform dedicated to spreading awareness of healthier lifestyles. Under @le_pamp, Vincent also created *That’s So Vegan*, a visual project merging creativity and education on plant-based foods and products
with uplifting information on veganism. Vincent also contributed content for Wellvyl, an organization dedicated to redefining the concept of wellness and making it accessible for all. Currently, he teaches English Composition at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). He completed working as the Community Outreach Coordinator for PEN America, traveling throughout the country organizing press freedom advocacy events. Vincent learned technical writing and program management after working as an Emergency Management Program Specialist for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Since then, he continues using storytelling as an instrument for change and awareness of advancing an understanding of justice and compassion. His poems have been published in a variety of different literary magazines and journals, and his music can be found on all streaming platforms.

**Dr. Seretha D. Williams** is professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Augusta University. She earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Georgia. Her research areas are in Africana Studies, women’s literature, trauma theory, the Black Chicago Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement. She focuses on the work of Margaret Walker (Alexander). Williams is co-editor of the collection *Afterimages of Slavery: Essays on Appearances in Recent American Films, Literature, Television and Other Media.* Williams is a digital humanities fellow at Augusta University, a graduate student in Library Information Science at Valdosta State University, and an Extending the Reach scholar with the Black Book Interactive Project at the University of Kansas. She is also the co-managing editor of *Third Stone.*