

It will take nations of billions to obstruct our dreams: extending BlackCrit through Afrofuturism

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to further theorize BlackCrit to include a deeper focus on the framing idea of Black liberatory fantasy via Afrofuturism.

Design/methodology/approach – To develop the theoretical connections, the author revisits their previous scholarship on Black girls' Afrofuturist storytelling practices to elucidate how the girls used their speculative narratives to critique the antiblackness present in their schools and the world at large and to create future worlds in which they have the power to create the world anew.

Findings – This paper discusses the relationship between BlackCrit and Afrofuturism by considering three interrelated ideas: how Afrofuturism acknowledges the antiblackness embedded in the USA; how BlackCrit makes space for liberatory Black futures and otherwise worlds; and how each theoretical idea inherently complements the other.

Originality/value – This paper creatively uses a hip hop album as a foundation for the portrayal of the intricate connections between Black pasts, presents and futures. As a conceptual paper, it pushes educators and researchers to consider the call and response between antiblackness and Black futurity.

Keywords Science fiction, Black girls, Afrofuturism, Black liberatory fantasy, BlackCrit

Paper type Conceptual paper

Peace! Armageddon, it been in effect, go get a late pass. Step!

This time around, the revolution will not be televised. Step!

-Public Enemy

In 1992, Public Enemy released an album entitled, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. This album received critical acclaim, but it did more than provide a few hours of musical escape. Rather, it delivered a conceptual treatise that used language, sound and rhythm to delineate the realities of Black life. As examples, *Bring the Noise* begins with the words, "Too Black/Too strong" and continues with lyrics that implore listeners to heed the lessons of revolution that are necessary in a country consistently at war with Black life. *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos* reminds the audience that prison cells and slave ships were born of the same antiblack origins and prompts them to consider the lack of humanity bestowed upon Black people in the afterlife of enslavement. *Prophets of Rage* details the anger and frustration that often surrounds the lives of Black people as they navigate the

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world, and it ends with the line, “you’re too hostile” to showcase how Black people’s anger is often dismissed because it is not tempered for white audiences. *Party for Your Right to Fight* not only discusses the rich history of Black life but also suggests that Black people must destroy the vestiges of whiteness that uplift antiblackness, to “emerge from hell” and reclaim and recover Black power in an antiblack world. Ultimately, Public Enemy’s album is a discussion of antiblackness in the USA, but it is also an Afrofuturist text of resistance as the rappers reclaim and recover the past, challenge negative and uplift positive realities that exist in the present and dream of new possibilities for Black liberatory futures.

The commentary embedded in Public Enemy’s lyrics is essential to note, especially as the opening interlude suggests that Armageddon, an event that implies a battle between good and evil and signals the destruction of the current world, has long been in effect for Black people (Sinker, 1992). Specifically, the album indicates that Black people have already experienced:

Brutalities so vile and degrading, and so historically unprecedented in scope and scale, that only Armageddon can accurately describe the advent of modernity on our collective past, and only the postapocalypse can define our present (Maynard, 2018, pp. 30-31).

Said another way, the violence enacted against Black people, brought forth through the vehicle of enslavement and bolstered by historical and contemporary Jim Crow laws, is and has been so violent and abominable that it must be classified as apocalyptic, as Armageddon. And yet, throughout time, even with death and destruction looming over Black people as we attempt to thrive in a world that craves Black death, Black people have made space to dream. We have chosen to celebrate and engage in the creation of new futures and new worlds rather than become stagnant and hopeless. We continue to dream for our right to fight.

The lessons centering Black life embedded in Public Enemy’s album suggest the need to further analyze how Afrofuturism can disrupt antiblackness and present possibilities for Black liberatory futures. Bearing this in mind, this conceptual article considers the album’s introduction – that the revolution will not be televised – and turns to story. Specifically, I revisit the analyses of three science fiction stories written by Black middle school girls who participated in an Afrofuturist writing workshop with me in the summer of 2019. Using the girls’ stories as conceptual borders, I show how each of the girls made inherent connections within and across Afrofuturism and BlackCrit, suggesting a natural bond between the theoretical ideals.

Bring the Noise, a theoretical clamor

Although explorations of antiblackness are predominantly concerned with the past or present, it is imperative to also discuss the speculative, as essential questions guiding discussions of antiblackness [i.e. “what does it mean to suffer?” and “how does one become free of suffering?” (Kline, 2017, p. 52)] require not only historical and contemporary realities but also an orientation toward potential futures. Considering this grounding, I explore the theoretical descriptions of BlackCrit (Dumas and Ross, 2016) and Afrofuturism (Lavender, 2019; Womack, 2013) alongside an examination of their use in education research to elucidate connections.

Prophets of Rage: BlackCrit

Formed from the need to expand critical race theory to address the needs and experiences of Black people and centered in ideas of Afro-pessimism (Wilderson, 2020), BlackCrit (Dumas and Ross, 2016) focalizes how Black bodies are often positioned as antithetical to humanity and considers how Black people might push back against this antagonistic relationship. Specifically, BlackCrit encourages scholars to consider “the significance of blackness in the social construction of White supremacy, and then in education specifically, how antiblackness serves to reinforce the ideological and material ‘infrastructure’ of educational

inequity” (pp. 431–432). In other words, BlackCrit demands a recognition of Black subjectivity alongside an analysis of the characteristic antiblackness that saturates the educational field and neglects and rejects Black students and Black communities.

To meet these demands, BlackCrit scholars use three framing ideas: first, theorists acknowledge that antiblackness is entrenched in the soul of the USA, as it pervades the everyday experiences of Black people in the afterlife of enslavement. Second, they note that, because neoliberalist logic claims the abolishment of racism, Black people experience tension within “the neoliberal-multicultural imagination” (Dumas and ross, 2016, p. 430). The tension stems from the neoliberalist failure to see the realities of Black life which results in the idea that Black people are constructing an imagined antiblackness. Finally, Dumas and ross (2016) argue that BlackCrit must make space for liberatory fantasy, a space in which Black people can imagine worlds where whiteness, as an oppressive construct, is destroyed.

Scholars have used BlackCrit in analyses of Black youth’s experiences in schools (Balldridge, 2020; Coles and Powell, 2020; Johnson and Nicol, 2020) and explorations of the how Black youth and Black communities reimagine individual, institutional and societal antiblack systems (Brown and Brown, 2021; Coles, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Quashie, 2021; Watson *et al.*, 2021). In literary studies, education scholars have examined the ways in which BlackCrit allows educators and researchers to notice how texts reckon with the hauntings of enslavement in contemporary Black youth’s lives, recover and rewrite historical narratives often missing from the US archival record and provide space for individual and communal healing as well as social justice (Cueto and Brooks, 2019, 2022). In fact, Gardner (2022) emphasized that because children’s literature is a site in which antiblack racism thrives, BlackCrit is an essential theoretical response. Specifically, she notes the following :

BlackCrit within children’s literature provides theoretical credence and specificity to several issues, including why not just any “Black” book or Black voice will do. BlackCrit also helps to center the visual, linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological aspects of blackness that exist within the folds of children’s literature. It is a theoretical lens that acknowledges that although racism and antiblack racism intersect, elements of antiblack racism featured in children’s literature are often distinct and historically connected to racial assemblages that are not neutral (p. 306).

BlackCrit, then, is an important obstruction to the antiblackness that manifests across all schooling spaces, from the students to the curriculum.

Collectively, these scholars suggest that “the future of black education research and practice hinges on both documenting barriers to black student school success and identifying promising pathways to actively dismantle such barriers” (Warren and Coles, 2020, p. 384). Thus, BlackCrit is essential to any discussion of Black youth’s lives, as it makes possible essential discussions surrounding the complexity of blackness and Black identities that exist in an antiblack world. Rather than just highlighting the sordid history of antiblackness, however, the scholars suggest the importance of futurity to the overall project of BlackCrit. BlackCrit is about antiblackness, but it is also about Black futures – the future possibilities of Black life and Black existence beyond the temporalities of antiblackness.

Party for your right to fight: Afrofuturism

The definition of Afrofuturism is contested terrain, as various scholars have described it as a cultural aesthetic (Morris, 2016; Yaszek, 2006), an artistic centralization of Black futurity (Alexander, 2018; Eshun, 2003), a prioritization of Black science and technoculture (Dery, 1994; Nelson, 2002), a critical theory and method (Ford, 2013; Phillips, 2015) and a literary genre (Wallace and Schwartz, 2022; Fauchaux and Lavender, 2018). However, even with definitional difficulty, several scholars align on the promises and possibilities of

Afrofuturist thought. As examples, [Lavender \(2019\)](#) stated that Afrofuturism can provide a protocol that can assist scholars in investigating the “optimisms and anxieties framing the future imagining of black people” (p. 2). [Womack \(2013\)](#) noted that Afrofuturism provides a speculative and freeing outlook on Black futurity. She argued that the concept ensures that:

Black identity does not have to be a negotiation with awful stereotypes, a dystopian view of the race [...] an abysmal sense of powerlessness, or a reckoning of hardened realities. Fatalism is not a synonym for blackness (p. 11).

Further, [Anderson \(2016\)](#) suggested that Afrofuturism allows Black scholars to reclaim the right to tell their own stories while also critiquing the presumed authority of whiteness to “be the sole interpreters of Black lives and Black futures” (p. 228). Essentially, even though scholars define Afrofuturism in robust and diverse ways, they agree that Afrofuturism provides a structure for thinking about Black people and Black futures unencumbered by whiteness.

Considering the intellectual labor of numerous Afrofuturist scholars across their alignments and their disagreements, I define Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic in which Black authors create speculative texts that center Black characters in an effort to reclaim and recover the past, counter negative and elevate positive realities that exist in the present and create new possibilities for the future (see Author 2022 for further explanation). I use this definition broadly. Black authors are the Black people who choose to write, speak, dance, sing and story their experiences in this world while acknowledging the experiences of their ancestors and confessing their hopes for the next generation of Black youth. Speculative texts illustrate how Black people have used their numerous literacy practices to envision their lives outside of the parameters of antiblack narratives that attempt to constrain Black people and Black culture ([English and Kim, 2013](#); [Gaiter, 2018](#); [Lavender, 2019](#)). Reclaiming and recovering the past is a way to excavate Black history while elevating positive contemporary realities in an effort to foreground the optimistic aspects of Black life in a world that thrives on deficit framings of black identity ([Holbert et al., 2020](#); [Nelson, 2002](#); [Wozolek, 2018](#)). Creating new futures centers how Black communities come together to collectively solve problems and create future worlds where inequality is no longer an issue ([Barber et al., 2018](#); [Carey, 2020](#)). Thus, in relying on the scholarship of numerous researchers centering Afrofuturism in their work, I consider Afrofuturism to be “a mechanism for understanding the real-world situations of oppression in the contemporary world in the context of the ever-present past, while charting the future” ([Hamilton, 2017](#), p. 19). I use it as both a means to consider Afrodiasporic cultural production and scholarly thought that enables researchers to consider identity, fugitivity, power and liberation in the past, present and future through a Black cultural lens.

As an educational framework, Afrofuturism offers researchers and teachers the space to eschew the antiblack racism of the contemporary world and imagine otherwise worlds and new liberatory futures in which Black joy and hope are foregrounded ([Davoudi, 2022](#); [Lavan, 2022](#); [Walters, 2022](#)). Afrofuturism also provides a vehicle for the upliftment of Black subjectivity and the creation of spaces in which Black people have power over their material, social and cultural resources ([Brown, 2022](#); [Grue, 2020](#); [Vercetty, 2022](#)). While BlackCrit investigates the dehumanization of Black people as foundational to the contemporary moment and the historical record, Afrofuturism considers the past and present to create more liberatory futures. If BlackCrit asks, “what does it mean to suffer?”, Afrofuturism provides a way to consider how Black people might become free of suffering. In this way, Afrofuturism and BlackCrit are linked; call and response.

Call and response: BlackCrit/Black liberatory fantasy and Afrofuturism

BlackCrit calls for a deep understanding of the violence of systemic antiblackness, a realistic discussion of the ways in which neoliberalist logics impede the abolishment of racism and the speculative creation of spaces where Black people can imagine the destruction of white capitalist heteropatriarchy. Afrofuturism responds to the call, enabling Black speculation and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002) in the midst of antiblackness. In an interview (Kemp, 2016), Afrofuturist scholar Reynaldo Anderson provides a foundation for this idea:

I would argue that Afropessimism, as a critical approach, helps keep contemporary Afrofuturism's thought and practice, ontologically or its sense of being, firmly grounded, with its sometimes utopian practices, and accountable to the masses of people previously determined by others to be savage or half human and non-human [. . .]. Afrofuturists are attempting to develop a framework to interpret, re-engage, build or negotiate an alternative future for African peoples everywhere facing intersecting problems of climate change, the rise of artificial intelligence, post-capitalism, recolonisation, and species extinction (par. 15).

Afropessimism is foundational to BlackCrit. Thus, BlackCrit can also be a means to keep the oft-utopian ideals held within Afrofuturism, especially in relation to education, firmly rooted to the historical past and the contemporary moment. Afrofuturism is concerned with the creation of Black individual and collective dreams and the cultivation of Black futures. Still, Afrofuturist dreams do not exist in a vacuum, and they cannot be purely utopic because the authors creating these texts are onto-epistemologically and physically connected to a world steeped in antiblackness and dedicated to the eradication of the Black. To interpret, re-engage, build or negotiate an alternate future, it is essential to understand the reality of Black life in the past and present.

Considering Afrofuturism in the context of antiblackness concretizes a firm connection to the BlackCrit framing idea of Black liberatory fantasy. Gordon (2022) was explicit in interpreting this idea by identifying it as a way to acknowledge the antiblackness of the present while maintaining an orientation toward the imagining of new futures and new worlds. He explained that even in the midst of an antiblack environment, Black people must have hope:

[. . .] hope in Black life, hope that we got each other, hope that – in the face of hegemonic common sense – we do know what's best for Black youth and our communities. There is much to have hope in, I simply no longer want to have hope in systems designed for and through the negation of our being. I want to have hope that we gon be alright, and that when we aren't, we will hold each other all the same (pp. 13–14).

Similarly, Bryan (2021) affirmed that Black liberatory fantasy enables Black people to create a world that does not contemporarily exist, a world where white supremacy and the ideologies of whiteness that attempt to bind Black life to inhuman or enslaved object are eradicated. This point of view was supported by Gilmore (2021) who acknowledged that Black liberatory fantasy enables Black people to refuse “white supremacy's toxic demarcations on humanness” and create possibilities for Black reclamation of humanity, beauty and brilliance (p. 119). It was also foregrounded by Coles (2021a, 2021b) who suggested that antiblackness is not and cannot extinguish Black joy. He furthers this point by stating that:

Although the history of systemic physical and mental degradation is important, the history of triumph within the moments of chattel slavery and in the wake of such a dehumanizing system is also just as important (p. 4).

These empirical and theoretical advances in education research indicate that Black Liberatory Fantasy is connected to Black imagination, Black life, Black refusal, Black joy and Black triumph. In this way, BlackCrit is more than just a focus on the hopelessness of antiblackness. It requires a concentration on the futuristic, the otherworldly, the optimistic.

The complexity of BlackCrit provides possibilities for Afrofuturistic connection, especially in the field of education. BlackCrit argues for the acknowledgement of antiblackness in the world, but in a world that is asphyxiated by antiblackness, it is imperative to foreground “speculative, fugitive, and creative ways that young children, educators, and researchers can make new worlds—worldmaking that envisions emancipatory Black futures, despite the overwhelming climate of anti-Blackness” (Nxumalo, 2021, p. 1192). BlackCrit requires a cognizance of the failures of the neoliberalist imagination, of the ways in which this visionary deficiency creates trauma and suffering for Black people. However, it is equally critical to understand that this awareness does not signal the end of Black imagination, but the “beginning [of] the longer project of Black freedom necessary to undermine and undo anti-Black oppressive systems” (Warren, 2021a). BlackCrit implores researchers and educators to make space for Black people to imagine worlds in which whiteness is destroyed as an oppressive concept, but that destruction will not occur unless there is a centralization of Black joy (Love, 2019; Tichavakunda, 2022), black fugitivity (Stovall, 2020; Stovall and Mosely, 2022) and Black imagination (Bell and Sealey-Ruiz, 2023; Dache, 2019).

Ultimately, Afrofuturism and BlackCrit are intertwined in that they can provide Black people with:

New ways of rethinking and redefining the past, present and future; [and allow] for historical methodologies fusing myth, science fiction, and realities of black oppression and resistance beyond the linear progress narrative (Maynard, 2018, p. 33).

Afrofuturism provides the wings that allow Black folx imaginations to soar beyond “what is” and toward “what can be.” BlackCrit, on the other hand, provides the tether to reality that keeps utopian ideas connected to the violent past and present. Together, they make space for the acknowledgment of the past and present and the imagining of an anti-oppressionist future.

Rebels without a pause: framing Black girls’ stories

To illuminate the connections between Afrofuturism and BlackCrit, I extend my previous scholarship centering Black girls’ Afrofuturist literacy practices (Toliver, 2020, 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Specifically, I draw from a larger qualitative research project that advanced the objective of exploring how six Black middle school girls used Afrofuturistic storytelling to discuss, critique and subvert experiences with social injustice. As an extension to the larger study, I examine the girls’ science fiction stories to denote broader connections between BlackCrit and Afrofuturism, a facet of research that was not centralized in other data analyses. The focus on science fiction narratives is intentional, as:

Only science fiction adequately captures and describes what it means to live with the knowledge that one is, in fact, human in a world that continues to negate or question this fact (Maynard, 2018, p. 32).

Additionally, the centralization of Afrofuturism is imperative in this scholarly re-examination because, although the research endeavor centralized Afrofuturism in all aspects (i.e. collective discussions, curricular activities and written products), each story submitted by the girls was tethered to the realities of antiblackness they experienced. Thus,

even though the overall research aimed to center the imaginative, the otherworldly and the beyond, the girls' stories showcased the framing ideas of BlackCrit, an unbreakable chain to the real world. Their stories suggested that Afrofuturistic content cannot always be untethered from antiblack realities.

In the sections that follow, I provide several examples that explicate how the girls used Afrofuturistic storytelling to directly respond to the call of antiblackness present in their schools and the world at large. In doing so, I showcase how the girls inherently, the aspects of call and response that connect Afrofuturism and BlackCrit.

Don't believe the hype

The minute they see me, fear me

I'm the epitome of "public enemy"

According to Tillis (2018), BlackCrit elucidates discourse beyond a focus of racism and reparation and:

Toward existential queries of knowing and being, the physical and psychological suffering that comes with denied humanity, and what it means to have one's very existence, as Black, constructed as a problem, rather than suffering from problems created by antiblackness (p. 313).

This explication leads to an understanding of how violence and dehumanization are forcibly mapped onto the bodies of Black folx as they contend with the white supremacist roots of the nation state. Further, it allows for a better cognization of the material, social and cultural deficits attached to Black existence. The situatedness of blackness as problem highlights tensions in the neoliberalist imagination and foregrounds a need for the creation of Black liberatory fantasy. Although this framing was not used as a pedagogical entry for the girls' storytelling, acknowledgements of antiblackness seeped through their narratives.

As an example, Avenae'J began her story by detailing the police state where people are drugged and beaten for challenging dominant ideals in society – whiteness, Western nationhood, "standard" English, white body ideals. She even comments on the myth of meritocracy that pervades Black life and details the dehumanization required for whiteness to thrive. Her opening story begins with a description of life dominated by white supremacist ideals:

Aljaska is a supposedly Utopian society where everyone is supposedly equal, and no one looks or sounds different outside of their home. No one and no thing is different. Everyone wears all black, the clothing is all loose and long so no one can tell the body shape of another or the race of anyone. They wear black scarves tied around their faces so that no one can tell their race or see their beauty, and lastly, they have monotone voice machines attached to them so when they talk an accent cannot be heard [...]. Myosotis, commonly known as Forget-Me-Nots, are used in medicines to erase the minds and suck out the souls of all who put it in their bodies. The white spruce tree is used to keep the people in the town, and its bark and sticks are used to deprive people of their personality. They are only used for the ones who start uprisings [...].

Fear of difference guides the narrative opening, as people in Avenae'J's story are forced to remove personhood to align with the ideals of white supremacy. Of course, she does not specifically mention whiteness or antiblackness, but it is an undercurrent of her story. When asked about the motivation behind her writing, she discussed being bullied by white students, being told that Black children are not normally good at science or coding and being devastated by the lack of humanity bestowed upon Black people in the USA as evidenced by police brutality and the disregard of Black life in the larger public sphere. Later in the story, she even provides a connection to the embedded nature of antiblackness,

suggesting that the Change Room, the space in which people are drugged and their souls are removed, is located “underneath the school,” entrenched in the roots of the education system.

Terrah engaged in a similar discussion of antiblackness as endemic, presenting an Afrofuturist story in which the USA is split into two sides: Miaeni (“the invisible side”) and Idonikoes (the “ideal or perfect side”). In the story, she explains:

Long ago, due to racism, sexism, and homophobia, the country that used to be called the United States of America split into Miaeni and Idonikoes. If you were oppressed you lived in Miaeni, and those who were in control lived in Idonikoes.

She also discussed the demarcation in a conversation with peers:

For the ideal or perfect side, I chose Greek because Greece is in Europe, and so I had the idea that side would be predominantly white. The word I picked is Greek for, I believe, perfect or something similar to that. It's either perfect or ideal, I think. So, when choosing a name for this new country, they would probably choose something from a European language or something. And then for the other side, the invisible side, it was a Japanese word because it's a different race. They would be predominantly Black, or Asian, or you know. And they would probably have chosen something that comes from a different race than just something European.

Terrah's description of the ideal side as connected to whiteness is critical, as she describes the inherent upliftment of whiteness (to the detriment of blackness) in the USA. Her words suggest that antiblackness in society situates whiteness as an ideal to which Black citizens must aspire. Those who refuse to desire whiteness are rendered invisible, displaced from perfection and physically separated from ideals of humanity.

As representative examples, both Avenae'J and Terrah's Afrofuturist narratives present a deep connection to BlackCrit. Specifically, they conceptualize the endemic nature of antiblackness, challenge myths of meritocracy and dispel the fables of multiculturalism pervading the USA. Together, they acknowledge “how policies and everyday practices find their logic in, and reproduce Black suffering” and explore the possible future of Black life “against the devaluation of Black life and skepticism about (the worth of) letting Black people go on” (Dumas and Ross, pp. 429–430). They conclude that the minute Black people are seen, they are feared and hated, the personification of antagonism that threatens white existence. To eradicate the public enemy, Black suffering – the loss of identity, the removal of the soul, the displacement – is presented as an integral facet of the white imagination, as any move toward multiculturalism results in the emotional, psychological and physical loss of Black life. Even in a story aimed toward dreaming beyond antiblackness and social injustice, the tendrils of antiblackness crept into the narrative and strangled the story at its foundation.

Show 'em whatcha got

Freedom is a road seldom traveled by the multitude...

Stay strong, sister

Brothers and sisters, please, join with me to welcome, and listen good

Although Black people consistently deal with dehumanization and violence in an antiblack society, Afrofuturism allows for “new ways to explore black being against its positioning as abject and subhuman” and for new descriptions of “black subversion as well as new otherworldly possibilities for black life (Maynard, 2018, p. 34). A basic assumption of this framing suggests that the white supremacist imagination is ill-equipped to handle the complexities of Black freedom, Black resistance and Black dreams. Even through its most

violent moments, it is unprepared to combat and defeat the imaginative capabilities of Black people who subvert and reject abjection as they move toward freedom. Living in and through antiblackness, Black people engage in Afrofuturism, in Black liberatory fantasy, to attack, disrupt and exterminate the hold of whiteness that grips the nation—by any means necessary.

In her story, Amber described a country in chaos, a place where protest is common and police retaliation results in the murder of unarmed citizens. With the vicious backdrop of police brutality looming over the narrative, however, Amber is more specific in the creation of her liberatory fantasy. In conversation with her peers, she argued that even though she lives in the *USA*, she knows that the country is divided:

[...] there isn't much peace going around. There are still people treated unfairly. Like, we [the collective of girls in the study] are Black, but we should all have equal rights, and it's unfair how we're still being treated unfairly.

Narrowing the discussion to individual rights withheld from Black youth, Amber focuses her futuristic thinking on attacking individual people who make the world difficult for Black girls to thrive.

In her story, the main character, Maya, faces bullying from the local youth, especially because her mother was killed by police officers after engaging in peaceful protest. This makes existence hard for Maya, and although she was taught to avoid violence, one day, she had enough of the bullying:

Before she could leave, she felt a shove to the back from a hand strong enough to knock her down by surprise. One second later, all Maya could feel was the cold and hard concrete [...]. She hit the boy so hard he's on the ground groaning in pain with hints of blood.

Rather than engaging in peaceful protest, turning the other cheek, or ignoring the presence of antiblackness, she uses her fists. She beats the bully until she sees blood, violently obtaining justice on her own terms. Rather than continue to face the viciousness of her peers peacefully, she engages in liberatory fantasy to physically beat injustice. The world may not be fair for Black girls, but in employing her Afrofuturist imagination, she can fight against inequity.

Avenae'J also presented violence as a means of retaliation against antiblackness, but rather than centralizing on the individual, she focused her efforts on creating a collective. After discovering the hidden torture chambers used to separate the personality and soul from the human, the main character in the story (also named Avenae'J) alongside two of her companions devise a plan to fight against the violence. Specifically, in a letter sent to possible accomplices, the trio provide visual and narrative descriptions of the cruel underground facility and call for community members to fight:

On that email, there are simple blueprints to making a gun and a drawing of the things needed to make the gunpowder inside of the guns. You can simply find these things at the store, just do not make it noticeable. As Barack Obama once said, "We are the change that we seek." The uprising will take place July 4, 2090, at 12:00 pm, the uprising will not start unless we feel that we have enough people, so we hope all of you join, because we cannot do this by ourselves, we need everyone.

Invoking the name of a president often used as evidence of the neoliberalist project, Avenae'J states that fighting back requires guns, not words. She speculatively alters the presentation of a Black president as a sign of racial progress, and she argues that "the change that we seek" might require violence and force, not speeches and acts of cunning. Contrary to the white neoliberalist imagination and its belief that antiblackness has already been eradicated

as evidenced by the presence of a Black president, she imaginatively initiates a future where community members gather their weapons to destroy white supremacy in the name of a neoliberalists icon. In an antiblack society, Avenae’J uses her Afrofuturist imagination to dream of a world where communities come together to be the change they seek.

In each illustrative example, the girls call to potential comrades in the fight against oppression. They use Black liberatory fantasy to argue for the need to “make[s] space for the notion of chants becoming battle cries, tears becoming stones in clenched fists, and the hand-written signs machine guns” (Dumas and ross, 2016, p. 431). They use their Afrofuturist narratives to imagine the eradication of whiteness that imposes restrictions on Black life and Black futures. Amber envisions a future that suggests that the road to freedom may not be traveled by multitudes, so she stays strong and constructs a space in which she has the power to fight back. Avenae’J, on the other hand, petitions that her brothers and sisters listen well and join her to bring forth a new world, where police brutality and racial oppression are violently destroyed. Both authors revel in the ensuing bedlam because, sometimes, the “first taste of freedom” (p. 431) demands chaos.

Countdown to Armageddon

Each of the girls who participated in the writing workshop wrote Afrofuturist stories, but their focus on possible futures was deeply tethered to the antiblack realities of the past and present. They considered historical wrongs alongside the violent acts of the current moment to hold whiteness accountable and remove any revisionist history that would allow dominance to go unchecked. Rather than wallow in hopeless, however, they dreamed of Afrofutures in which they had the power, the community and the strength to exterminate the hold of whiteness, to uplift the possibilities of the Black despite a world that continuously attempts to eradicate Black people. They combined Afrofuturism and BlackCrit without prompting because the two frameworks exist in the same orbit. If blackness is the nucleus, Afrofuturism and BlackCrit are the electrons. In this way, even if they may not always be attracted to each other (e.g. sometimes, it is essential to focus on the realities of an antiblack world, and sometimes, it is critical to dream beyond antiblackness and white supremacy), they are still connected, drawn to the core that is Black life (Figure 1). They each generate an electric field that exerts an attractive force on Black people, and they each exert a repulsive force against whiteness and the white supremacist imagination. Thus, the girls did not need me to call forth ideals of BlackCrit as framing for their Afrofuturist narratives because the two ideals are intrinsically connected – one does not exist without the other as the complexity of Black life requires the realities and speculative possibilities of both.

And thus, I return to the opening interlude of Public Enemy’s album to conclude this conceptual argument. If Armageddon been in effect, if the apocalypse has already occurred, then the battle between good and evil is currently underway, and the destruction of the current world has already begun. Right now, Black people are fighting against the evil of white supremacy, working to demolish the chokehold whiteness has on the USA before our collective social death. Right now, Black youth are battling the specific constructions of antiblackness that pervade schools—segregation, policing, pushout, bullying and curricular erasure. Right now, Black communities exist in a constant state of bereavement as the murder of Black folx are virally shared on social media and in the news. But a countdown is not the end. It is a clarion call that suggests there is still time, that hope is still possible. It is a reminder that we can still destabilize and negate antiblack systems (Warren, 2021a). The apocalypse is here, but so are we. We can still fight for our right to dream.

Numerous education researchers are already fighting to subvert antiblackness and uplift the dreams of Black people, generally and Black youth, specifically (Auerbach, 2021; Coles, 2020;

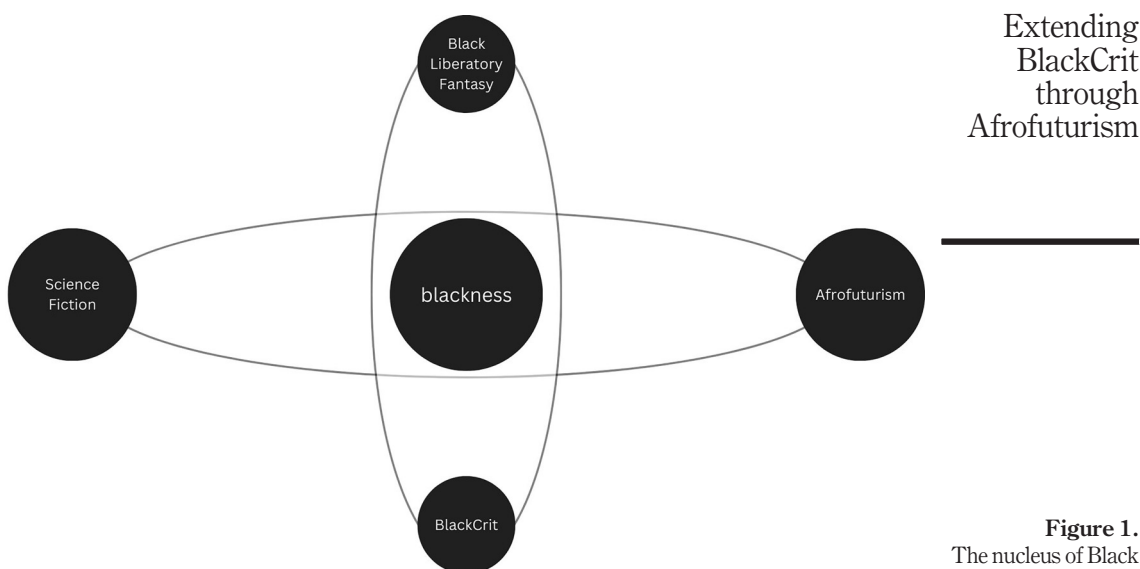


Figure 1.
The nucleus of Black
presents and futures

Source: Author' own work

[Nxumalo, 2021](#); [Warren, 2021b](#)). However, it is essential that more education researchers connect their goals across Afrofuturism and BlackCrit. Specifically, we must not give into despair and only concentrate on the numerous ways in which antiblackness attempts to asphyxiate the presence of Black people and murder – physically and spiritually – Black existence. To do so is to suggest that Black existence must always centralize a negation of whiteness, that scholarship on Black identity cannot exist without a discussion of the white supremacist heteropatriarchy. Additionally, we must avoid the sole centralization of utopian dreams of an anti-oppressionist world in which Black people are free. It is essential to dream and construct otherwise worlds free of antiblackness, but because we do not currently reside in a utopic, anti-racist world, we must not forget the tether, the realities from which we dream. The girls' tacit narrative theorizing and Public Enemy's album suggests the need to consider both aspects of Black life – the antiblackness that pervades our existence and the dreams we seek despite violence and trauma. Of course, this is not to say that we can never focus on one or the other, but it is essential that we look toward the connections between both theories, as the connections exist whether we highlight them or not. Black scholarship needs and deserves both frames.

Ultimately, the combining of BlackCrit and Afrofuturism allows for an analysis of the historical moment and the not yet here. The unity across frameworks allows for a count down toward Black elevation – to lift off from this antiblack world and journey toward the next, to dream of futures and otherwise worlds that resist and surpass the white supremacist imagination, to move past destruction into a rebirth of Black existence toward an expansive state of becoming. BlackCrit and Afrofuturism are reality and possibility bound as one. Collectively, they suggest that even in this antiblack world, where Black people are consistently labeled as public enemy number one, whiteness can never hold us back. It will take a nation of millions to obstruct our dreams, to inhibit our Black liberatory fantasies. It will take a nation of millions to prevent the creation of Black worlds and Black

futures within and beyond Armageddon. It will take a nation of billions to hold back our futures.

Black dreams, they been in effect, go get a late pass. Step!

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