

“Dreamland”

Black Girls Saying and Creating Space through Fantasy Worlds

S.R. Toliver



Abstract: The rampant murder of Black women and girls in the United States proves that this place is not safe for them. In fact, it is questionable whether any space currently known can be safe when antiblackness and misogynoir are interwoven into the fabric of our world. For this reason, researchers must explore the unbound landscapes Black girls create for themselves in fantastic narratives. In this article, I examine the fantasy short stories of two Black middle school girls who participated in a writing workshop to explore how they resisted spatial control by creating new worlds they had the power to construct and dismantle.

Keywords: Black girl cartography, Black girlhood, Black ratchet imagination, saying space, social geography, speculative fiction



Ever since I was little, I’ve been calling the place where I think about stuff dream-land or imagination land... I could be thinking about my day, and then I just... wind up there. (Victoria)

Introduction

It’s an old city, built on the backs of enslaved people forcibly removed from their homelands and compelled to till the soil for the benefit of white slave owners. It’s an old city, where modern people walk through slave plantations and expect to be regaled by the beauty of Black death. It’s an old city, where new government legislators create hundred-page documents outlining the history of the city but skipping over enslavement and relegating Black contribution to a list of firsts. It’s an old city, where Black history bleeds through the underground, and Black people tether themselves to their roots, hoping this grounding will save them. It’s an old city, where young Black girls see and feel the barricades built to keep them tied to oppression, a historic city, where Black ancestors rise from the soil to break the chains trying to enslave Black girls’ imaginations. It’s an old city. It is every city. It is the collective heartbeat of the United States of America.

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Ma'Khia Bryant. Tyisha Miller. Sheneque Proctor. Aiyana Stanley-Jones. Janisha Fonville. Kendra James. Alteria Woods. Darnesha Harris. Gynnya McMillen. I say their names as protest in a world that erases Black women and girls from larger conversations on police brutality and social justice. I say their names to bear witness to joys, dreams, and hopes dashed by a bullet. I say their names to negate stereotypes that situate Black female bodies as monstrous and deserving of death at the hands of society's heroes. I say their names to show how the rampant murder of Black women and girls in the United States proves that this place is not safe for them.

* * *

I began this article with a description of an old city that came from a journal entry I wrote after reading the speculative stories of six Black girls who participated in a writing workshop with me in the summer of 2019. I follow this vignette with the names of Black girls murdered by police officers because the girls and the city are intricately connected. The United States is a socio- and geo-political place where the mattering of Black life is contingent on the spaces occupied. Thus, Black existence, space, and place are entwined, inseparable. Katherine McKittrick (2006) argues, however, that "because black women's geographies are bound up with practices of spatial domination, saying space and place is understood as one of the more crucial ways geography can work for black women [and girls]" (xxiii). So, just as I say the names of Black girls in remembrance of their lives, Black girls can say space and respond to the spatial domination and physical/emotional violence they endure. Thus, in this article, I examine how two Black girls said space through the creation of fantasy narratives.

I center these stories because the revolution begins with imagining new worlds and breaking "with the current injunction to 'keep it real'" (Kelley 2002:193). I also focus on the girls' fantasy narratives because "the future of Black girlhood and Black Girlhood Studies rests on the continued work of scholars with Black girls to imagine futures that centre their ideas and imaginations" (Halliday 2019: 5). The study of Black girls' fantasy narratives presents possibilities for revolutionary onto-epistemologies that challenge anti-Blackness and support the creation of worlds where Black girls are loved. Further, foregrounding the oft-ignored dreams of Black girls asks readers to contend with the current experiences of Black girls in schools and the world at large and to reconceptualize homogeneous responses to the construction of socially just futures. To engage in this critical work, I centered two research questions:

In what ways do Black girls experience spatial control?

How might Black girls use speculative fiction writing to resist spatial domination?

To answer these questions, I used Black girl cartography (Butler 2018) undergirded by the Black ratchet imagination (Stallings 2013) to examine how two Black girls say space amidst state-sanctioned violence.

Centering Black Girls' Imaginations

A focus on Black girl imaginations is essential in an examination of Black girls and spatial domination because their dream worlds are often rendered invisible in the dominant imagination. Ebony Thomas (2019) maintains that in the white imagination, Black girls are considered monstrous, Other, deserving of violence and death. In fact, for many people of color, "to participate in the fantastic is to watch *yourself* be slain—and justifiably so, as the story recounts" (23, emphasis in original). Thomas's critical work showcases how Black girls are often labeled the enemies, the villains, the spectacle. They are not heroes, and they are never worth saving in the fictional realm. Relatedly, the widespread murder of Black women and girls suggests the Dark Fantastic Cycle is not relegated to fiction since real Black girls are often deemed Other, monstrous, inhuman, villainous (Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews 2020; Kelly 2018; Morris 2016). Thus, they, too, must be slain just like the monsters in fantasy tales. For this reason, a focus on Black girls' imagination is essential because it can break the status quo and assist Black girls in resisting social, civic, and imaginative death (Brown 2013).

Reaching toward the unknown, the imaginary, is critical for Black girls because it sets the groundwork for Black girl resistance (Toliver 2018). For instance, Black girl imaginations can create new worlds and possibilities, thereby dismantling problematic and artificial boundaries obstructing Black liberation (Moore 2017). They can redefine and (re) present descriptions of Black girlhood, "deconstruct[ing] misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Black girls' lives" (Adomako 2018: 16). Further, Black girl imaginations can provide spaces to practice freedom and pleasure, unpredictable places that are difficult to map (Garner et al. 2019). Ultimately, Black girl imaginations allow space for Black girl transgressions (Hill 2019) in a world that tries to relegate Black girls to silence, to compliance, to reality.

Black Ratchet Imagination

L. Stallings (2013) claimed that the Black ratchet imagination allows Black people to engage in a politics of refusal through which they can reject respectability and limitations on Black identity and unleash the imaginative and activist spaces deemed improper by dominant society. Through this definition, Stallings connects ratchetness to liberation thus refusing racist ideologies that restrict Black people to dominant norms confining speech, behavior, and social interaction (Pickens 2015). Further, by aligning ratchetness with imagination, Stallings focuses on Black creation and the imaginative and revolutionary ways Black people dreamed new futures and created new possibilities for Black existence. Since the word ratchet is often connected to terms such as foolish, ghetto, and ho'ish, Stallings's theoretical project reframed the term ratchet as nebulous, ephemeral, agentive—a word with the ability to bend to the will of the user. As a malleable term, ratchetness becomes an ideal space to examine how Black youth unleash their liberatory consciousness and push back against oppression by using their creativity and imagination to undo restrictions of gender and racial identities often prescribed by whiteness (Love 2017; McEachern 2017).

For Black girls, the Black ratchet imagination can be a space of liberation “that undermines misogynistic, heteronormative, and anti-Black societal messages that challenge and prevent [their] well-being” (McEachern 2017: 88). For instance, Ashley Payne (2020) notes that ratchetness allows Black girls to escape the oppressiveness of respectability, build homeplaces hidden from the oppositional gaze, and celebrate themselves without fear. Therí Pickens (2015) suggests that ratchetness “functions as a tertiary space in which one can perform a racialized and gendered identity without adhering to the prescriptive demands of either” (44). Of course, Black girls who challenge oppression and respectability do not always identify as ratchet, especially since the term has a complex social history (Brown and Young 2017; Cooper 2012). However, I center the Black ratchet imagination not to discuss the history of ratchetness but to explore how Black girls' imaginations can be a ratchet project in their rejection of geographical and sociopolitical reality as they create anti-respectable and Black girl-centered fantasy worlds in which they create themselves anew.

Saying Space as Ratchet Imagination

Social geographers have long documented the link between race and place, specifically highlighting the spatial effects of anti-Blackness in the wake of chattel slavery. For instance, unequal food allocation in Black neighborhoods, over-policing in Black communities, gentrification of predominantly Black neighborhoods, and unsafe water resources in Black areas collectively display the fraught connection between geography and racial existence (Bledsoe 2019; Browne 2012; Jenkins 2021; Reese 2019). Although many researchers have centered the legacy and history of enslavement on modern geographies, some have questioned the predominant belief that geography is static or immovable. They note that Black people often produce space and give that space meaning, thus foregrounding the idea that Black spaces are not fixed by the history of enslavement; Black people transform violent spaces into something new.

Particularly, McKittrick (2006) argues that Black “[g]eographies of the everyday that are normally undermined or prohibited by transparent space and traditional racial and sexual geographic inequalities are re-expressed in... black fiction, black theory, black music, black geographies, black imaginations” (21). Black people use a variety of everyday mediums to shed light on realities and peoples some consider irrelevant or unnecessary. We use hip-hop music and lyrical artistry to represent neighborhoods that dominant society ignores (Forman 2000). We engage in digital revolution tactics “that refuse/elude hegemonic digital-social-spatial orders and mediate for ways of thriving otherwise” (Elwood 2021: 210). We use our voices to protest those who wish to do harm to our communities (Bledsoe and Wright 2019), and we use imaginative and playful dream spaces to create new worlds that completely transform the societies we have come to know (Kelley 2002). In saying space—through literature, protest, song, theory, and imagination—we work to define ourselves for ourselves, even though racialized and gendered violence surrounds us.

By saying space, then, Black girls can engage in a practice of freedom dreaming that creates spatial openings in places of spatial confinement. They can engage in revolutionary acts of refusal that reject the respectability confined by what is and create new possibilities by imagining what could be. They can map their own worlds and become the cartographers of landscapes unburdened by dominant control. Ultimately, saying space can be a ratchet project in which the respectable nature of traditional cartography is

upended and replaced by liberatory maps constructed within the realms of Black girl imaginations.

Method

To examine how Black girls say space and create new worlds, I rely on an analysis of data I gathered from a two-month writing workshop for Black middle school girls. The workshop took place at the Harbor, a nonprofit writing program housed in a library in Savannah, Georgia. Although anonymity usually requires pseudonymous reference to locations, I name the place because doing so allows me to map the location of the workshop while also holding myself accountable to the people with whom I work. Moreover, since this article centers space and place, I name the location to position this work in a socio- and geo-political context and to showcase the specific spaces the girls attempted to disrupt.

Research Context

Savannah, Georgia is in the southern United States, a locale rife with history. It was a port location for the Atlantic slave trade (Bell (2002) 2020). It has ties to segregation since some Jim Crow laws were still legal in Savannah until 2005 (Carababas 2015). It is connected to instances of protest as Black people have demonstrated against injustice from the Civil Rights Movement to the present day (Rary 2021; Russell 2012). Although the workshop took place as part of a nonprofit writing program held within a local library, the larger context was the city of Savannah, the state of Georgia, and the country of the United States.

Research Partners

For the larger study, I recruited six Black middle school girls, but for this article, I focus on the two girls, Victoria and Talyn¹ who wrote fantasy stories. Unlike the other girls in the study, they created new worlds rather than focusing on the possibilities and/or boundaries of this one. I understand identity to be fluid based on time and space, but at the time of this study, Victoria identified as a bisexual, Black, 14-year-old girl, and Talyn

identified as a pansexual, mixed (Black and South Korean), 13-year-old girl. Rather than reduce the girls to superficial categories, I include the words they used to describe themselves when I asked them, "How do you see yourself?"

Victoria

I'm a 14- about to be 15-year-old girl who is Black and bisexual at the same time. I wear glasses. I have dark brown skin, I would say. I have very coarse black hair. Let's see... I have brown eyes. I'm more into comfort than fashion, so I wear sneakers more than flats and stuff like that. For some reason, when I'm at school or in public, I am deathly afraid of being alone because I never know what could happen. But when I'm at home, I like being with people, but then at the same time, I want to be by myself. I guess I just... at home I just find more comfort in being alone than being with people, and then when I'm out in public, I find more comfort being with people than being alone.

Talyn

I'm not someone who is too important, but people know I exist. I rarely get in trouble, and I don't get any horrible grades. I see myself as a person who can empathize with others who have been through it even if I haven't been through it myself. I think I can understand what it's like to feel like you've been in the wrong because you're a certain age or a certain type of person, you're this color, you're this gender, you identify as this person, and you like this certain thing. I can understand that, and I feel like I can get to some of the people who don't. I can help them understand because not everyone is always informed.

Data Sources and Analysis

To analyze the data, I used Black girl cartography that requires an explicit focus on place, race, and gender (Butler 2018). I focused the analysis on what Victoria and Talyn said about the spaces they avoid or those in which they spend their time, places they feel included or excluded, and spaces where they feel welcomed or rejected. Every time the girls mentioned a specific location (such as school, home, restaurant, and so on), I noted both the location and the discussion to hone the analysis. After several rounds of reading, I looked across the data to note the places mentioned consistently and the stories attached to these places.

In conducting this exploration, I found that collectively, they mapped themselves at home and school even though the research took place in a

library setting away from these locations. I also noticed that these spaces had contentious descriptions since both school and home had positive and negative spatial meanings. I then read the girls' short stories several times to consider how they broke through the spatial boundaries of reality through the creation of fantasy worlds. By engaging with the data in this way, I was able to better understand how specific locations held meaning, how the girls imbued the settings of their fantasy stories with meaning and how the girls used their stories to say space in the midst of spatial dominance.

Excavating the Self

A key aspect of Black girl cartography is self-reflection, an analysis of how I, an adult Black woman, came face-to-face with my younger self. I was raised in New Castle, Pennsylvania, in a neighborhood formerly redlined to contain poor people who worked in the local mills. My side of town was considered hazardous, and the city's refusal to provide basic assistance ensured that the alleged dangerous zones would never shed the race- and class-fueled segregation of the city's past. However, my mother and grandfather taught me the importance of imagining new possibilities and creating hope in dismal situations, and those lessons helped me reframe my thoughts about my community. Instead of trash displaced on roadsides, I saw people the government dismissed attempting to make space in their devalued homes. Instead of seeing potholes filled with rocks, I saw how my community came together to ensure the safety of those who lived there and those who visited. Instead of seeing poor Black folks quarantined to the city's west side, I saw how imagination was a social justice practice that helped my community survive. Thus, in mapping Black girls' imaginative landscapes, I charted my own past, present, and future. I charted my family's and my personal need to create new spaces unbound by reality, space, and time.

Findings

I organize the findings under two headings, *This World Was Not Made for Us* and *These Worlds Are Made for Us*. In the former section, I highlight the spatial control existing in the United States, whereas in the latter I examine how the girls created spaces of disruption in their speculative worlds. Arranging the findings in this way showcases the overlap between the girls'

fantasy worlds and their real-life experiences, rather than separating the data by specific spatial locations.

This World Was Not Made for Us

During the workshop, I interviewed both girls about their lives, their writing, and their short stories. In two separate interviews, before and after they had written their stories, I asked the question, "Can you tell me your definition of social justice?" I asked because my research question for the larger study focused on how the girls wrote and spoke about their social (in) justice experiences through Afrofuturist stories, and I wanted to ensure that I was analyzing their writing using their definitions of social justice instead of my own. Although I was not anticipating their critical answers, the girls' responses offered a perspective on how they experience life in the United States. Specifically, to answer the question, Victoria said,

I would say... people allowed to be who they are. Like, you look at the news now, and you see people having to be scared because they're Black or people having to be scared because they're in the LGBTQ community or whatever. And it's like, OK, I am who I am... why can't you accept me for what I am? Like, people being scared of Black people because of some type of stereotype of 'Oh! They wear their pants too low, so they must be gangsters,' or 'Oh! I have to hold my purse because I don't know if they'll rob me,' or 'Oh! I don't understand gay people, so I'm against them.' It's kind of like you are this, and I don't understand you, so either I'm going to be afraid of you, or I'm going to hate you.

Her response suggests a recognition that her identities as a bisexual Black girl cause others to fear and hate her, so her definition of justice concerns her ability to exist without being feared or reviled.

Talyn's definition was different, but she also commented on how many places in this world present as difficult spaces for Black girls to thrive. When I asked about her definition of social justice, she said,

Just making sure that the person who did the crime did the thing that's wrong. Like, when my brother's friends came over, and I recorded them saying stuff on my phone, and I sent it to my mom, and he got in trouble, which is something I was proud of. They were very inappropriate about the things they said... like sexualized things. It was not good... I don't remember the exact words, but it was like 'You wanna hop on this dick.' I don't know if that was because I was a girl or because I was his sister or whatever, but I did not like that. That was not OK, so I recorded it and sent it to my mother.

Talyn's response focused on her home, a place often connected to security and protection. Instead of safety, however, she was harassed by her brother's friends. Also, although she said her brother was not around during

this event, she mentioned that she was not sure if he would have come to her aid had he been. Her narrative suggests an awareness that Black girls are not safe in a patriarchal world where they are harassed because of the bodies they occupy.

Although the girls' examples took place in different locations, their comments converged when I asked about school. For instance, Victoria told me about a time when her Black classmate randomly asked if she was a slave. She explained,

And I asked her, 'Why would you say that?' And she said, 'Hmm,' and just walked away with her group of friends. So, I sat at my desk crying for the rest of class. My teacher asked what was wrong. And I said, 'Nothing,' because the girl was part of the popular kids, and I didn't want to get on their bad side because elementary school is brutal.

Victoria's reticence to tell her teacher implies a social order that situates Victoria at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It also suggests a distrust in her teacher's and/or the school's ability to protect her from emotional violence. In fact, the classmate's behavior was ignored until Victoria asked her mother to speak to the teacher. Victoria's mother provided safety. The school and the teacher did not.

Rather than providing a concrete example, Talyn stated that some white teachers in her school were racist. Specifically, she said, "I know a few teachers that are racist. Most of the kids are Black, so the teachers... it's a whole mess... They just don't like the Black kids at all. Like, they do not care." Talyn did not single out a specific teacher. Instead, she used general terms to suggest that it was not an individual trait, racism is embedded in the school's landscape. Although Victoria's and Talyn's stories differ, both depict school as a treacherous space for Black girls.

Collectively, the girls' statements suggest that home, school, and the larger world are not spaces in which Black girls can exist safely. These girls are feared, harassed, brutalized, and are not cared for. They are considered Other, the thing that must be diminished, conquered, or abused to appease those who are considered normal and human. These comments imply a need for Black girl imaginative spaces since the worlds Black girls create can provide spaces currently unknown in which Black girls can resist, refuse, and refuel.

These Worlds Are Made for Us

Although the girls often discussed spaces hostile and/or unsafe for them in the real world, their short fantasy narratives showed a rejection of spatial

limitation; they created places of Black girl magic hidden from the oppositional gaze. In Victoria's short story, a Black female doctor is kidnapped and taken to an unknown land where she learns that she must defeat her evil uncle and take her rightful place as queen. Although the doctor initially rejects her role, a flashback reminds her of her loving parents who were killed by the evil uncle, and a guard who whisked her away to ensure her safety. Following this memory, she yells, "We have to stop my uncle. I remember everything now." She accepts her place as queen and new ruler of the land, she reconstructs the world her uncle has worked to destroy, and she brings peace to a land in pain.

On its own, Victoria's story showcases a world in which Black girls are powerful enough to rule, places where Black princesses are handled with care and love. Connected to Victoria's real-life experience, however, her story engages in spatial disruption. In conversation, Victoria emphasized the personal details she imbued into her fictional character. She said,

The main character is based off me... We're both introverts but extroverts. If my first plan for career of becoming a restaurateur does not work, I want to become a general surgeon. So, yeah, that and basically her whole personality 'cause she's, like, goofy but then serious sometimes, and then some points she's just wanting to be alone, and then she doesn't want to be lonely.

Here, Victoria connects the story and her personal life, showing how she infused personal characteristics into her fantasy character and how she blended realistic and fantastic worlds. By having her character reflect herself, she is transported away from a world where she is hated and feared and where she feels too powerless to speak up and fight back against popular girls. In her fantasy world, she is loved for who she is and for the power she wields. She has the authority to make change in going against the brutality of her uncle without fear. In her fantasy space, she has the power to practice freedom and reject limitations on her identity.

Whereas Victoria placed her character in a fairy-tale world, Talyn set her story on the battlefield. Her story begins with a confrontation between the main character, Kokolane, and an unnamed opponent who commends her newfound strength. After the short opening battle scene, the story flashes back three years. In a diary entry, the main character writes, "I finally got to be a soldier. One step closer to being a part of my village." The focus on wanting to be a community member is important to Talyn's story since Kokolane's main goal is to gain respect from herself and from the people around her. She explained,

So, the story is about becoming a soldier, um, [and] getting respected by the people around her. She doesn't live in the city. She lives in the forest 'cause she doesn't like people, so she starts to get respected, and then she's sent to battle and then comes to terms with herself... Then, the resolution is just her liking who she is.

It is unclear why Kokolane is disliked in the community or why the character does not like herself, but Talyn is clear that the character's personal motivation is guided by a need for both personal and communal respect.

Throughout the story, Kokolane writes a series of diary entries, but the final battle is shown through direct action. In this scene, the protagonist watches as members of her soldier family are killed, one by one. She tries her best to fight alongside them, but clearly, they are losing. Suddenly, the general is attacked.

'Kokolane!' she hears the general yell. She looks to see the general struggling to keep up a fight. She quickly goes over to kill the orc he's fighting. She hears an arrow. It came from behind her. It killed the general. She grabs a dead man's bow and arrow, then kills the last soldier.

'Kokolane... do you realize what you are?' a deep voice says. It sounds like the voice of a shadow.

'You... you're the mole Arkasan?' She turns to him. He looks more like an Eodunal soldier without all the makeup. It was more disturbing than before. And to think, she used to think of him as an ally. As a friend.

In this excerpt, Talyn shows Kokolane coming face-to-face with a traitor who took away the last vestiges of love and safety she had left. As a character fighting to gain communal respect, losing part of her community is difficult for her. To make matters worse, the person causing the strife is someone she had believed to be an ally; someone who was supposed to bring care and love is the instigator of Kokolane's pain. In the end, however, rather than giving up, using latent power she did not know she possessed she fights the traitor and wins. After overcoming her foe, she realizes what she can do, and she learns to respect and love herself.

Although Talyn does not directly tie her real-life experiences to her fantasy story in the way Victoria does, her experiences are threaded through the narrative. In describing spaces of oppression, Talyn mentions home and her brother's refusal to protect her. He did not stand up for her when his friends were harassing her, and as someone who is supposed to be her family, her ally, his actions make him traitorous. In real life, Talyn found the power to record the conversation and send it to her mother to defeat the young men, but in the story, Kokolane finds internal power to defeat her enemies and combat the person she once trusted in making him pay for

making her feel alone and unsafe. Additionally, in real life, Talyn knows some teachers in her school do not care about Black students in refusing to see them as part of the school community, but in the story, Kokolane finds community by fighting alongside others who are dedicated to the cause of freedom. In this way, Talyn uses her fantasy story to dismantle problematic and artificial boundaries obstructing her ability to create safe spaces filled with personal and communal respect. She says space and visualizes Black girl safety, a space where Black girls' survival does not rest on dominant standards of respectability. In her world, Black girl survival rests on the latent power hidden within each of them.

In both stories, the girls use fantasy fiction to say space. They respond to the spatial domination occurring in schools, in cities, and at home by creating worlds where they have the power to challenge and refuse. Through fantasy narratives, the girls challenge racism and gender oppression by creating realms where they can fight those who bring physical and emotional violence in their wake. Through fantasy fiction, they create new worlds that reject the spatial confinements imposed by reality. Through fantasy stories, they resist and rewrite their lived experiences in new spaces in which the outcomes are safety, freedom, and love. Victoria and Talyn say space by undermining the geographical violence of reality and creating new existences through story.

Black Girl Speculative Fiction Is a Ratchet Endeavor

Victoria and Talyn both said space by creating worlds in which Black girls have the power to fight back against oppression and win. In doing so, they used the Black ratchet imagination to build places of safety hidden in the pages of their notebooks or in the intricate recesses of their minds. Through fantasy worlds, the girls unleashed their liberatory consciousness and pushed back against oppression by using their creativity and imagination to undo restrictions that attempt to confine their gender and racial identities. Through their characters, they fought their oppressors, critiqued Western civilization, and refused restrictions on Black girlhood. They used their dreams as a project of anti-respectability, one untethered to the spatial limitations of reality.

It is important to note, however, that these stories were constructed in a welcoming space. Victoria acknowledged the harsh realities of this world, and Talyn recognized that home is not always a safe place for Black girls.

Additionally, both girls acknowledged that school is not safe for Black students generally and Black girls specifically. Black girls need safety to dream their way out of spatial dominance and control. They need spaces that honor their dreams and uplift the geographical landscapes they create. If school is not safe, if home can be a space of hostility, and if the world is violent, where might these spaces be? As I dream of possibilities, I believe the following questions must be considered:

How do we make Black girl dreaming possible/impossible?

How do home and schooling spaces exert spatial control over Black girls, and how might we refuse the urge to control Black girls' spaces?

In what ways might we make room for Black girls to say space to exert their liberatory consciousness?

These questions are basic, but they are essential if we are to construct spaces where Black girls feel free enough to engage in the anti-respectable project of dreaming and imagining new spaces of freedom. Victoria and Talyn know this world is not safe for them, but they used their fantasy writing to create worlds of safety that make space for them to thrive. All Black girls should have the ability to say space and refuse spatial control.

Conclusion

Every city, state, country, and continent is connected to anti-Black geographical realities, suggesting limited spaces of safety for Black girls. However, Black girls' fantasy worlds provide new spaces where they have the freedom to choose how they want to be represented, new landscapes where they have the power to fight back, and new worlds where they can survive and thrive. In these imaginative places, Black girls say space and create worlds unbound by domination and violence. In these narratives, Black girls provide the groundwork for future liberation. Black girls' imaginations are vital for resisting social, civic, and imaginative death, but they are also critical for uplifting Black life, Black joy, and Black mattering. It is within Black girls' dreams that this world, this old city, can start anew.



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Note

1. These are pseudonyms.

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