

## Black History Month

# AFROFUTURISM

“What do I think when I think fantasy? I actually see it as a reworking of our own history... And, in many ways, our history has been co-opted. And so, when I hear Afrofuturism, what comes to my mind is we’ve taken [history] back, and we’re rewriting it. Not only are we writing our past, but also a lot of those stories that are steeped in our tradition, our storytelling tradition, our myths, our gods, our religion.” -- **Rita Woods**



Combining science fiction, fantasy, and history, Afrofuturism explores the African American experience while envisioning a more just and free future. This political, artistic, and social perspective carries across a number of mediums including art, philosophy, fashion, cinema, and literature. Embracing and intersecting themes of liberation, utopia, and historical narratives, this perspective is present in a number of literary genres, but particularly throughout science fiction and fantasy.

Symbolized by bold colors, technoculture, and icons of African culture, Afrofuturism was first defined by American scholar Mark Dery in 1993. However, the movement has long existed in Black culture since enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to America; African American history greatly influences the narratives told through the genre. Forty years before Dery’s essay “*Black to the Future*”, jazz artist Sun Ra brought aspects of Afrofuturism to audiences with his futuristic themes and experimental music. His 1974 film, “*Space is the Place*” is considered the epitome of the genre and combines history, fantasy, and science fiction over an incredible soundtrack. Over time, the perspective found a home in comics, from William Hendersen “Billy” Graham’s work to Jim Owsley (later known as Christopher Priest) in the Luke Cage and Black Panther series.



While traditionally dominated and represented by men, Black women began occupying space in the field, finding their voice, and are now many of the most popular names in Afrofuturism literature. Octavia Butler was the first science fiction writer to win a MacArthur fellowship in 1995. N.K. Jemisin was the first author to win the Hugo Award for both Best Novel three years in a row (2015 - 2018) and Best Novelette (2020), and Nnedi Okorafor also won prizes for her work including the 2016 Nebula

and Hugo Award. Women are also reshaping how Afrofuturism is represented in television, movies, and music. Superhero films and television are included in this, as when Regina King played the lead role of Angela Abar / Sister Night in the popular HBO series *Watchmen* (2019). The female-dominated Black Panther movies are some of the most popular of the Marvel films, and the first to earn a Best Picture nomination. Janelle Monáe’s album *Dirty Computer*, along with the book based on the music – *The Memory Librarian: And Other Stories of Dirty Computer* – were met with positive reviews as well.



*“For me, Afrofuturism is a reimagining of history. It's like going back and reclaiming how history has seen Africans and African Americans throughout time. It's this idea that the past, the present, and the future is not linear, but circular in a sense. Our present is influencing our future is influencing our past. It's just playing with time and how we retell our own stories with our own agency.”* -- **Heather Beachler**, the first African American nominated for an Academy Award for Best Production Design, which she won for Black Panther



### JOIN US IN CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

- **Displays in Ramstein & Vogelweh Libraries**
- **Afrofuturism reading list** (in-person & digital materials)
- **Black History Month-themed Story Times:**  
Ramstein: 02, 09 and 16 February at 1030 and 1530  
Vogelweh: 01, 15 and 22 February at 1030