Incendiary Dramas:
Black Theatre Classics and Afrofuturism

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How do Afrofuturism and Black Theatre fit together? A provocative question worthy of deep thought! Loosely construed, Afrofuturism provides a critical descriptive lens to explore Black culture that questions the commingling of race, science, and technology, with a dash of the supernatural thrown into the mix from a largely African American context which impacts how we perceive literature, music, and film. In the late great Black culture critic Greg Tate's profound words, "Black people live the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine."[1] In other words, "afrofuturism has emerged to understand the science fictional existence that Blacks have *always* experienced living in the new world—an unreality driven by economic demands, would-be science, and skin color."[2] Alien and alienated, enslaved Africans experience "science-fictional Blackness"[3] in being forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean "on alien ships"[4] to "alien land(s)"[5] while being coerced to learn languages, eat foods, and practice religions alien to them by strange white beings. Consequently, a strong alien metaphor exists at the heart of Afrofuturism, at the root of Black experiences in the New World. Afrofuturism, therefore, simultaneously challenges and encourages us to look at the racial experiences of the past, to consciously behold the alien encounters shaping the Black condition in the Americas, if not the globe, and to gaze beyond the past to glimpse different futures. For it is in this seeing, where the Du Boisian color-line[6] breaks down, where social revolution begins, and where hope for change

[1] Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (1993): 768. Dery quotes Greg Tate here. This set of interviews with these three important Black culture critics serves as the foundation of Afrofuturism.

[2] Isiah Lavender III, *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019), 9.

[3] Meagan Jordan, "Netflix's 'My Dad the Bounty Hunter' Is an Afrofuturist Marvel," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, February 14, 2023, https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-features/my-dad-the-bounty-hunter-netflix-animated-afrofuturism-Black-family-1234675186/. Jordan quotes Lavender.

[4] Jordan, "Netflix's 'My Dad the Bounty Hunter' Is an Afrofuturist Marvel," Quotes Lavender.

[5] Jordan, "Netflix's 'My Dad the Bounty Hunter' Is an Afrofuturist Marvel," Quotes Lavender.

[6] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903; New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 3. DuBois states, "the problem of the Twentieth-Century is the problem of the color-line." This classic 1903 statement highlights the primary racial binary in the United States that metaphorically separates Black and white people in cultural, political, and legal senses.

manifests. Afrofuturism offers both emancipatory visions and cultural alarums—lightness and dark. In other words, Afrofuturism surveys all kinds of tomorrows built upon the past.

In this regard, mere awareness of Samuel R. Delany, Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and many others as a wellspring of Black science fiction does not suffice. Nor does acute knowledge of the sonic imaginings of Sun Ra, OutKast, and Janelle Monáe, let alone the cinematic visions of Jordan Peele, Ryan Coogler, and Nia DaCosta. Afrofuturism *is* so much more than fiction, music, and film. But where does theatre come into play?

For just a moment, consider African American playwright Douglas Turner Ward's one-act play *Day of Absence: A Satirical Fantasy* (1965), where all the Black inhabitants of a Southern town vanish without warning on a Tuesday. Ward suggests that chaos would ensue amongst the white population with no one to do the dirty work for them or with no one for whites to simply look down upon as he scathingly critiques white supremacy through the power of theatre. The production notes call for Black actors in whiteface to add a further layer of satire, "a reverse minstrel show done in white-face."[7] With his town paralyzed and white citizens in an uproar, the mayor decides to "immediately mobilize our Citizens Emergency Distress Committee"[8] to find the missing Blacks. When the committee fails, the mayor will later make an emotional appeal on national television for Blacks to return to their jobs just before the rioting starts. Everything seemingly returns to normal on Wednesday morning when a Black worker named Rastus is seen walking to work and interrogated by the two white men Luke and Clem, who opened the play with a queer feeling and their slow recognition of how they "don't see no Nigras…?!"[9] five pages into a twenty-six-page play!

The disappearance en masse invites an Afrofuturist interpretation of this civil rights era play. White supremacy ends for a solitary day. Not once do the whites rationalize why the Blacks disappeared. Ward indicates that the emotional time and energy spent by white people then and now on being perceived as racist stultifies any progress made on race relations. Black oppression seems ridiculous to many of them, that Blacks should simply get over it. Why? Ward envisions a short-lived post-race future based on racism as a human failing which might be why the Blacks return. Perhaps, Black folks simply wanted a day free of anxiety, a day to feel human. Regardless, Ward illustrates the cultural and psychological effects of racism on white people when Black people are absent and it is their fear of the loss of power. He bravely demands that we acknowledge the ongoing suffering of Black people with edged humor and further demands righting these wrongs.

[7] Douglas T. Ward, "Day of Absence," in *Happy Endings and Day of Absence: Two Plays* (New York: Dramatists Place Service Inc., 1994), 29.

[8] Ward, "Day of Absence," 40.

[9] Ward, "Day of Absence," 35.

From a theatrical standpoint, live performance provides a place to see Afrofuturism at work. The live performance element, the bringing of an imagined reality to real-life, in a sense, with real people, playing the parts in front of other real people, generates amazing stories of Black experiences. Thus, the unexplained disappearance of the nameless town's Black citizens changes the world, if only for a minute, where white people, such as Luke and Clem, must question if everything is the same as always—a relevant uncertainty built on the kinds of tomorrows offered by Afrofuturism's engagement with the past. It could be hopeful just as it could be cynical.

The dynamism of Black Theatre certainly lends itself to Afrofuturist speculation and critical thought. The mood and atmosphere of any play for the audience depend on the characters and their relationships as brought to life by the actors and their interpretation of the scripted words that form the plot. I am talking voice—breathing, vocalization, inflection, pitch, diction, projection, dialect—and nonverbal expressions to go along with movement. I am also talking about stagecraft, lighting, musical accompaniment, props, and symbolism to help the actors generate the dramatic tension necessary in space and time. All of these dramatic elements—literary, performance, and technical—come together to create the simultaneously artificial, magical, breathing world of the stage that the audience experiences through the play itself. Theatre amplifies the stuff of life—joy, sadness, oppression, violence, laughter, love, and emotions that cannot otherwise be described. The beauty is in the sparked thoughts firing in resistance to being made to feel lesser.

We see this spark in Lorraine Hansberry's American classic *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) when Lena Younger witnesses her son Walter Lee stand up to the white man Karl Lindner, a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, in refusing his money to stay put in the Chicago ghetto on the South Side by not moving into the house purchased by his mother in the white suburb. In fact, all of the women in Walter Lee's life, his wife Ruth and younger sister Beneatha, as well as his son Travis, bear witness to this powerful moment of growth, of becoming a man. As the play ends and Lena stands alone in her oppressive apartment for the last time, she stifles a desperate scream with a fist in her mouth—desperate because of the trapped feeling she has been repressing for decades, created by the restrictive housing covenants in the Windy City forcing Black people to live in squalor at exorbitant prices working menial jobs if at all working. Lena initially leaves her potted plant behind. This plant explicitly signifies her dream of a better future for her family long deferred. The plant's symbolic value *is* Afrofuturist in nature because of the hope for life that it represents. At this definitive moment in the play before the final curtain, the lights dim, the door opens, and Lena grabs her plant and exits to an unknown future. Metaphorically speaking, the change of address represents moving between a Black world and a white one. Of course, we already know the future the Younger family faces as they attempt to break out of the ghetto—burning crosses, bricks thrown through glass windows with racial vitriol scrawled on them, and fire-bombing as a white mob of concerned citizens attempts to drive them out of Clybourne Park, a fictional white neighborhood. This forewarning

arrives in Act II, Scene Two courtesy of nosy neighbor Wilhemenia Othella Johnson and her folded newspaper with the headline "NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK—BOMBED!"[10] An Afrofuturist viewpoint offers a distrustful optimism here 64 years later with integration on the verge of collapse in light of current socio-political winds.

Replete with Afrofuturism, Black Theatre provokes many future visions. As proof of what I mean, Ward's play speculates on the turmoil of a post-race world when all the Black people in a Southern town inexplicably disappear leaving white people behind, whereas Hansberry's play evokes both space flight and planetary romance as the Younger family moves between worlds. In a science fiction context, a planetary romance involves an adventure, often by starship, on one or more worlds. But in Afrofuturist lexicon a planetary romance literalizes the metaphor of the color line in emphasizing the social-cultural environment of separate Black and white worlds as Black people go between spaces in search of a better tomorrow. Afrofuturist framing hinges on metaphor and meaning. Amiri Baraka's Obie-Award winning play, *Dutchman* (1964), two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning Black playwright August Wilson's short play *The Janitor* (1985), and two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning Black playwright and MacArthur "Genius" Fellow Lynn Nottage's one-act play *Poof!* (1993) represent three more such disparate visions ranging from an alien encounter to a progressive vision offered in a speech, to spontaneous combustion. In other words, a red-headed white woman stabbing a Black man to death on a New York subway symbolizes an absurd alien encounter in *Dutchman*. A Black custodian giving the speech of a lifetime to a barren room epitomizes the hope germane to Afrofuturism in *The Janitor*. And a Black woman disappearing her abusive husband with a thought, turning him into a pile of ash—poof—spontaneous combustion, and sweeping him under a carpet, represents psionic power, a supranatural ability in *Poof!*. Each of these plays represents the creative force of Afrofuturism and the desire to make better futures by exploring other possibilities.

Encountering the Alien

With respect to Amiri Baraka's explosive one-act play *Dutchman*, quite a bit has already been said about the nature of its allegorical meanings in terms of old testament Christianity and race relations when the protagonists Lula and Clay Williams first meet in the New York City subway car.[11] I do not feel the need to rehash these interpretations of a skimpily clad, beautiful

[10] Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Random House, 1959; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 102.

[11] George A. Levesque, "LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*: Myth and Allegory," *Obsidian: Black Literature in Review* 5, no.3 (1979): 33-40. George Piggford, "Looking into Black Skulls: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and the Psychology of Race," *Modern Drama* 40, no. 1 (1997): 74-85. Christopher Baker, "A Trip with the Strange Woman: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and the Book of Proverbs," *South Atlantic Review* 80, no. 3/4 (2015): 110-128. For more thought on the conversation surrounding allegorical meaning in Baraka's play, here are three articles across 44 years that represent the discussion.

white seductress "eating an apple"[12] who sits down next to a younger Black man, uncomfortably close in fact, and proceeds to simultaneously flirt with and taunt him in trying to get him to react to her provocation. Lula degrades him, calling him everything from "a Black nigger,"[13] to a "middle-class Black bastard,"[14] to an "Uncle Tom."[15] Clay, malleable to white society, does eventually respond with a double face slap and long speech about killing whites to end racism before Lula stabs him to death with a knife and has the other passengers toss his body off the train while she resets and waits for her next Black male victim in an ostensibly unending cycle.

I prefer to think of this densely symbolic play from an Afrofuturist framework represented by the alien encounter between a Black man and a white woman that America has historically manufactured to end one way—Black death. Miscegenation means Black death for the larger part of American history. In this light, Lula represents white oppressive force, an excuse to kill Black men; to be perfectly vulgar in order to make my point, Black men's kryptonite—white women and their sacred pussies. In fact, Ida B. Wells-Barnett cautions about it in *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (1895) by offering three excuses for the lynching of Black people; first, to prevent race riots; second, to prevent Black men from exercising their constitutionally provided right to vote; and, third, to prevent or avenge the rape of white women.[16] In answering Lula's baiting with assault, Clay signs his own death warrant. He extraterrestrial-izes himself as something other, as something Black to the white imagination and the moment generates a powerful feeling of science-fictional Blackness that trans-historically resonates into our future present.

Put another way, the alien encounter with whiteness from the othered position only ends one way. *Dutchman*, first staged in 1964, prophetically projects the hyperreality of its violence into our present with the recent death of Jordan Neely, a displaced and destitute, mentally-ill, Black man, who was choked out of life by a white Marine veteran on the NYC subway on May 1, 2023.[17] That's May 1 of this year, 59 years after Baraka's play was first performed! Baraka captures the truth of this "hyperreal violence loop"[18] in Lula's line near the end of the first scene, "May the people accept you as a ghost of the future."[19] Clay, molded as a Black man in white

[12] Amiri Baraka, "Dutchman," in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature: Volume 2*, eds. Henry L. Gates, Jr. and Valerie Smith (New York: Norton, 2014), 675.

[13] Baraka, "Dutchman," 680.

[14] Baraka, "Dutchman," 684.

[15] Baraka, "Dutchman," 685.

[16] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*, 2005, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14977. See "The Case Stated," for further information on the three excuses that Wells-Barnett provides for lynching in the late nineteenth century United States.

[17] Andy Newman and Michael Wilson, "How Two Men's Disparate Paths Crossed in a Killing on the F Train." *New York Times*, May 7, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/07/nyregion/jordan-neely-daniel-penny-nyc-subway.html.

[18] Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising*, 11.

[19] Baraka, "Dutchman," 681.

American society from our country's inception, racially constructed as an unknowable entity, *is* already always confronted with fear, malice, and violence resulting in his fatality. Such marking haunts us. And recognizing these default patterns of control embedded in white culture, and critiquing them through theatre and other artistic mediums, perhaps provides the key to an Afrofuturist reimagining. Consequently, Baraka's play functions as a warning of what the desire for assimilation could mean for Black Americans of the civil rights era, a future exemplified through Clay that represents not just a Black failure to be integrated, but a failure of America itself to recognize and appreciate the humanity of Black people.

Speech to a Vacant Room

While Baraka's play presages the disappointment of the civil rights era, the esteemed August Wilson's *The Janitor* augurs a fleeting impulse of Afrofuturist hope, a catalyst for a better tomorrow. In Wilson's one-scene play, a Black janitor, named Sam, sweeps a hotel ballroom and its stage in preparation for a "National…Conference…on…Youth"[20] of which Sam clearly favors because young people represent the future of any country, of any race. But then he stops sweeping. Sam has had an epiphany. He approaches the lectern and pontificates to an empty room in his colloquial dialect. Sam represents the voice of the underprivileged through his position as a fifty-six-year-old janitor, even further on the fringes of society as a Black man. He recognizes that he is more than his low-paying position, more than his perceived place in society, more than his race, and worthy of respect. As Sam states, "'I am not what I am.'"[21] Sam has an opinion and he voices it from the podium to a vacant space. Transformed by the freedom offered in this circumstance, he takes this opportunity, as seemingly hollow as it is, to offer powerful advice to the young people he imagines occupying the ballroom in a few hours. This move on Wilson's part clearly warns us that we should appreciate, value, and hear the opinions of the supposed lowly in the future.

Sam imparts life lessons to these imaginary youth in his speech as he eclipses his social station as a janitor and its minimal prospects. He takes us beyond stereotypes and their dangers as well as the exclusionary class tactics that imprison the poor in poverty. In fact, Sam defies our dim cultural views of what a janitor should be with images of rivers, forgotten gods, and angels in displaying his keen, if uneducated, mind. He demonstrates the potential of such people given half the chance. Like youth, his "speculation and its resilience…that's its bounce back…is remarkable."[22] He has seen some things, lived through some tough times as a Black man in America, made tough decisions, and taken responsibility for his actions. In accepting his past, with its "forgotten…names of the gods,"[23], Sam can move forward, Black people can advance.

[20] August Wilson, "The Janitor," in *Take Ten: New 10-Minute Plays*, ed. Eric Lane and Nina Shengold (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 337.

[21] Wilson, "The Janitor," 337.

[22] Wilson, "The Janitor," 337.

[23] Wilson, "The Janitor," 338.

While these forgotten gods represent the "systematic, conscientious, and massive destruction of African cultural remnants,"[24] this awareness and acceptance of Black peoples' dislocation signals a new beginning, restores a tenuous connection, and seeds the future. The heart of Sam's advice to these young people relates to staying in touch with one's self and what they want to be as time passes and to get after it, rather seize the day by taking advantages of opportunities to carve out your own future "wrestling with 'Jacob's angel'."[25] This wrestling represents commitment and courage to change the future in weighing every decision to live a better life. Resilience, acceptance of the past, and commitment helps to change things for the better in the best Afrofuturist way, linking together people, places, and events in a "Black networked consciousness"[26] that allows a useful knowledge exchange across time. That is, learning from the past experiences produces the tomorrows Black people want, desire, and wish to experience.

As the play reaches its climax, the audience sees Sam as a thoughtful human being with important knowledge to pass on to young people. However, in his enthusiasm, with Sam about to say more, to wax downright lyrical, his white boss Mr. Collins comes on stage and disrupts Sam in mid-speech: "Come on, Sam…let's quit wasting time and get this floor swept. There's going to be a big important meeting here this afternoon."[27] Surely, the audience will hear the exasperation in the voice of Mr. Collins and see it in his reddened, scowling face. Mr. Collins wholeheartedly believes the stereotype of Black laziness and he thinks that he witnesses Sam dillydallying while on the job. In fact, Mr. Collins has no concept of Sam's eloquence and does not hear the deliverance of such heartfelt words in Sam's speech of a lifetime. Mr. Collins only sees time being wasted. It would incense Mr. Collins who has no idea that Sam's speech would probably be a hundred times more helpful than the vainglorious speeches of glad-handing, smug politicians and businessmen. Sam replies, "Yessuh, Mr. Collins. Yessuh"[28] and returns to sweeping. Mr. Collins diminishes Sam, puts him in his place, ends his resistance with a few words, and squanders his moment. Despite the evident wasting of Sam's potential as a speaker on the subject of taking the future into one's own hands, Wilson's *The Janitor*, this briefest of plays, conveys an Afrofuturist hope in linking the past, present, and future through respectability politics in the struggle for social justice as Black people strive for acceptance as human beings in an over raced country.

Man on Fire

Poof! differs from the other plays significantly because it comments on patriarchal oppression from within the Black community. It has not been thought of through an Afrofuturist

[24] Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," 746. Dery quotes Samuel R. Delany here.
[25] Wilson, "The Janitor," 338.
[26] Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising*, 5.
[27] Wilson, "The Janitor," 338.
[28] Wilson, "The Janitor," 338.

lens as it ignites the twin flames of hope and agency for Black women. Lynn Nottage provides an ominous note before *Poof!* begins. The note states, "Nearly half the women on death row in the United States were convicted of killing abusive husbands. Spontaneous combustion is not recognized as a capital crime."[29] Nottage establishes the conditions for an intense discussion of spousal abuse, where a woman obviously battered by her husband over the long years of their marriage finally responds in kind by uttering a solitary sentence, five words, and how it can end with murder. But Nottage brilliantly undercuts the seriousness of her topic with the absurdity of spontaneous combustion, where a body bursts into flames without a discernable source of heat, a fire so intense that it instantaneously reduces the body "into a huge pile of smoking ashes,"[30] functioning as the untraceable killing mechanism. Nottage tackles the clear hypocrisy, if not injustice, of women on death row for killing their husbands in self-defense with this clever ploy.

With that information imparted, the play opens in a dark kitchen during the present day in the middle of a pitched argument between Samuel, an abusive husband, and his long-suffering housewife Loureen that is about to turn violent. Shouting, Samuel threatens Loureen: "WHEN I COUNT TO TEN I DON' WANT TO SEE YA! I DON' WANT TO HEAR YA! ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR—"[31] and Loureen responds: "DAMN YOU TO HELL, SAMUEL!"[32] A bright flash happens, the lights come up, and just like that, the figure of Samuel is a pile of ash laying on the carpet in the middle of the kitchen with his glasses on top of his remains. The power of Loureen's words suggests that she sends him there, and condemns him to hellfire for his poor treatment of the woman he supposedly loves.

Apart from this supernatural explanation and the other subtle Christian imagery in the rest of the play, another possible more scientific explanation presents itself. Loureen causes an invisible chemical reaction to the impending physical abuse that she has no doubt experienced and stored up, intensifying her emotional outburst of unadulterated, heartfelt words "DAMN YOU TO HELL, SAMUEL!"[33] She takes this othering experience, mentally converts it into psionic energy, and uses this newfound pyrokinetic ability, triggered by words, to crisp her husband. This happening *is* certainly otherworldly. It is just as plausible as the Christian explanation. Spontaneous combustion circumvents the crime of murder. Loureen's words have power in this moment because their meaning crystallizes her feelings and perceptions arising from her emotional response to Samuel's threat when it registers in her mind. She ashes him with the newfound strength of her own voice, long silent as she stands up to her husband with her rediscovered agency. Her words ignite a spark that eventually leads to her freedom by the end of the play as signified by her sweeping her husband's remains under the kitchen carpet with her

[29] Lynn Nottage, "Poof!," in *Crumbs from the Table of Joy and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communication Group, 2004), 91.
[30] Nottage, "Poof!," 93.
[31] Nottage, "Poof!," 93.
[32] Nottage, "Poof!," 93.
[33] Nottage, "Poof!," 93.

mood considerably lightened. This feeling of hope is Afrofuturism in action at the thought of her impending future, free to create her own world.

In any case, Samuel *is* gone in the opening two lines of the play. Loureen, experiencing a bit of guilt and confusion, calls her girlfriend Florence on the phone, and invites Florence over to the apartment, where the two women discuss the situation at the kitchen table. Florence asks if "that muthafucka hit"[34] Loureen again to which Loureen explains, "No . . . he exploded. Boom! Right in front of me. He was shouting like he does, being all colored, then he raised up that big crusty hand to hit me, and poof, he was gone . . . I barely got words out and I'm looking at a pile of ash."[35] In thinking about this quote for a moment, why doesn't Nottage choose boom for her title? Why poof? A boom is a loud, prolonged, and disruptive sound whereas a poof conveys a sudden disappearance. Likewise, a secondary meaning of poof expresses a contemptuous dismissal of something; in this case, Samuel. One second, he is there, and the next instant he disappears from Loureen's life. The flash of light symbolizes the immediacy of the encouraging change that will take Loureen a few moments to accept as the play moves forward. Poof *is* exactly the right word and Nottage does not want Loureen to be associated with the powerful violence of an explosion that boom captures. We learn that Samuel's voice routinely explodes in rage at his wife. We learn through context and stereotype that Samuel is Black because he is loud as Black people are often described "being all colored."[36] His hand is also described as "crusty"[37] as in dirty and unwashed as well as conveying someone short-tempered and gruff. Anyway, crusty is another way of saying ashy in the Black community; in other words, extremely dry skin that is whitish and cracked in appearance in desperate need of some kind of emollient cream. Nottage excels at double-meaning to communicate her social politics.

Initially, her best friend Florence cannot believe that Loureen has done it, and then done it without her since the two women have often hypothetically discussed killing their husbands to escape to newer and freer lives together. While Florence is happy for her friend, she worries for her own self, still trapped in a loveless marriage to Edgar with kids to think about as well. Florence even asks Loureen to do the same to Edgar and Loureen sagely says no because Florence has to do it for herself in standing up to her husband. Florence *does* help Loureen to decide to tell people that Samuel finally left Loureen as he often threatened to do as Florence makes her exit. Alone, Loureen sweeps his ashes under the carpet and sits down to dinner as the play ends.

Let me revisit the social politics at work. For me, the race of the characters matter. While abuse happens in every racial demographic, statistics confirm that Black women experience the

[34] Nottage, "Poof!," 96.
[35] Nottage, "Poof!," 96.
[36] Nottage, "Poof!," 96.
[37] Nottage, "Poof!," 96.

highest rate of intimate partner violence despite low reporting of such occurrences.[38] Other context clues throughout the brief play suggest that the cast *is* Black. For example, "muthafucka" [39] is African American vernacular to designate a mean and vicious person in one sense. Florence uses this term to label Samuel when she asks Loureen to explain what happened after a drink of sherry. Certainly, a white person could use this idiomatic expression, but Florence goes on to ask if Loureen has "been messing with them mojo women"[40] or "smoking crack."[41] I think it safe to say that evoking conjure and drugs rules out a white cast. Nottage provides yet another clue in terms of the deep distrust these women have of the police in calling 911 and the many previous times Loureen called for help when Samuel abused her only to be ignored. Generations of Black people see police as menacing, biased, and violent in their interactions with Black communities across the country as opposed to being a source of protection. That is, police treatment of Black people *is* simply not the same.

The Afrofuturist hope in Nottage's play derives from this Black woman's newfound agency and freedom in response to the interlocking oppressions of gender and race. Loureen's better day has arrived and she can do whatever she wants with it. She now defines herself and that defines a different world.

To return to the original question at hand: how do Afrofuturism and Black Theatre fit together? Very well, I should think. I mean is there anything better than seeing, hearing, and experiencing the energy of creative resistance?! Afrofuturist theatre can change the conditions of possibility, meaning the destabilization of racial power structures. It leads to social transformation and potentially better futures by providing "emancipatory mindscapes."[42]

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[38] Susan Green, "Violence Against Black Women –Many Types, Far-reaching Effects," *Institute for Women's Policy Research*, July 13, 2017. https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/race-ethnicity-gender-and-economy/violence-against-Black-women-many-types-far-reaching-effects/. For more information, see Green's article.

[39] Nottage, "Poof!," 96.

[40] Nottage, "Poof!," 97.

[41] Nottage, "Poof!," 97.

[42] Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising*, 196.

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