

Throw Your 3-Sign Up: Race & Resistance in *The Hunger Games*

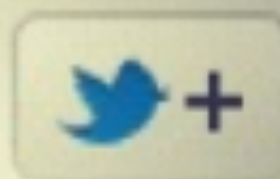
Osei Alleyne, PhD Student, University of Pennsylvania





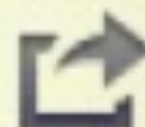
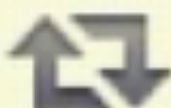
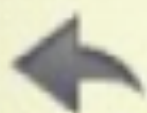
Cliff kigar

@Clif_Ford_Kigar



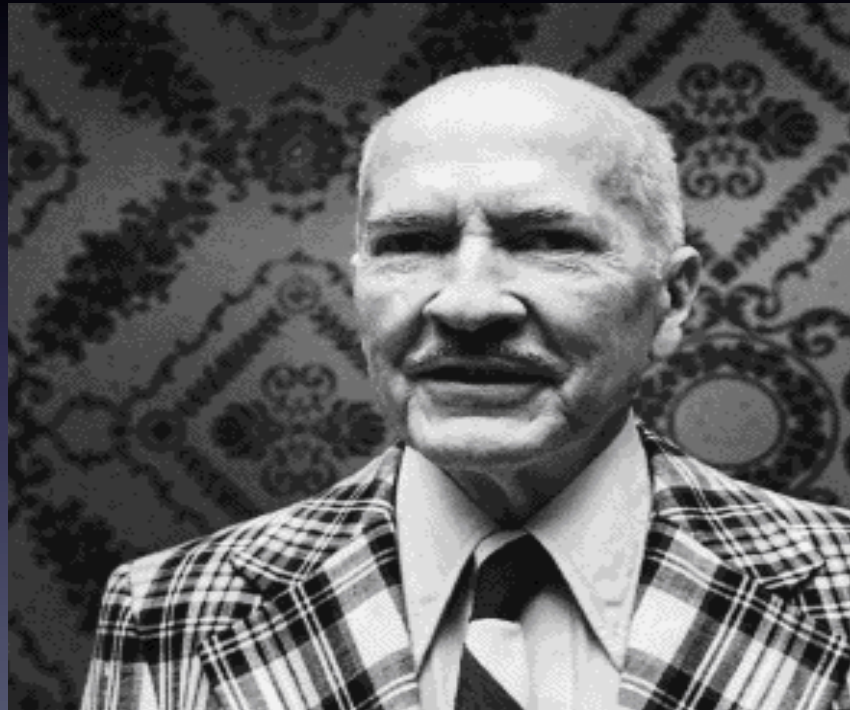
Sense when has Rue been a nigger

4 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone



Science Fiction: Speculation for a Liberation?

Robert A. Heinlein

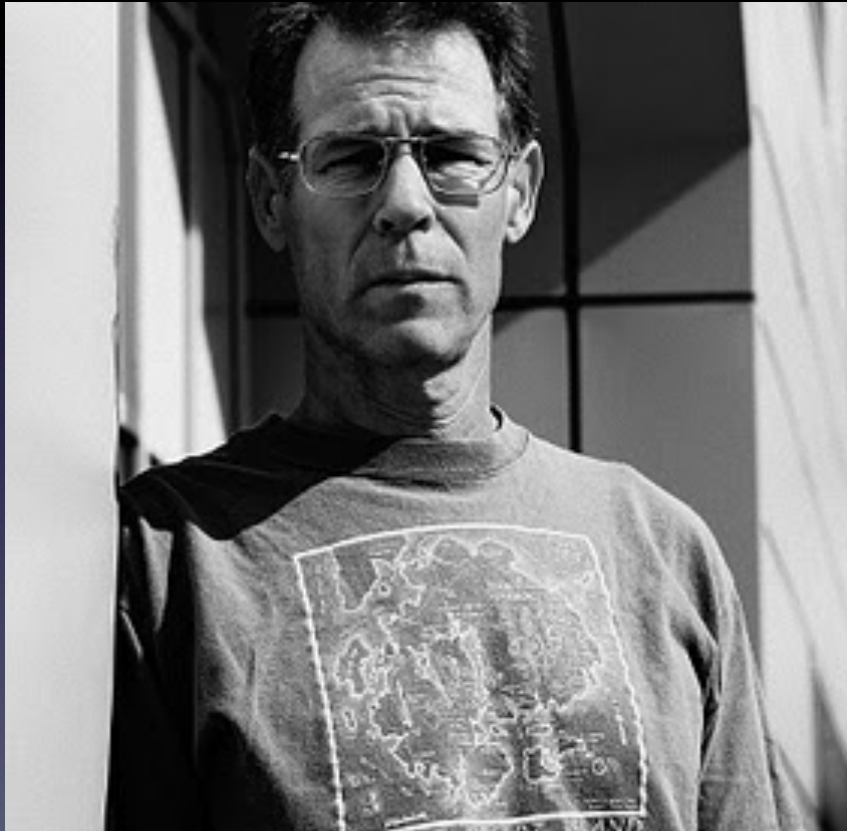


- Science Fiction is “Realistic speculation about possible future events based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present and on a thorough understanding of the nature and the significance of the scientific method.

“ - *Robert A. Heinlein*

Science Fiction: Speculation for a Liberation?

Kim Stanley Robinson



- “Science Fiction is an historical literature....in every science fiction narrative there is an explicit or implicit history that connects the period depicted to our present moment, or to some moment in our past”

- *Kim Stanley Robinson*

Science Fiction: Speculation for Liberation

Suzanne Collins



- Science fiction writers can use its imaginative possibilities to hypothesize worlds where existing social problems have been solved; they can also imagine a future where the problems have been magnified or extended into a grim dystopia.
- At the same time, however, they are bound and constructed by numerous other forces, including their own culture and experiences and their publisher's expectations and target audience.
- – *Elizabeth Anne Leonard*

Science Fiction: Speculation for a Liberation?

Planet of the Apes, 2001



- Science-fiction speculates on encounters with 'others' whether they be marauding or benevolent aliens, artificially intelligent cyborgs or competitive and hostile primates .
- We must examine how these figurative encounters with 'otherness' reflect society's contemporary and historic engagement with 'other' ethnicities genders and races as defined by this hegemonic Western patriarchal society.

Sisters in a struggle

Katniss and Rue connect



- Through the sisterly relationship between Katniss and her only avowed ally Rue, Suzanne Collins racializes the heroine, painting her at once as open and unaware of or at least unconcerned with outward appearance.
- Through scenes in training and a series of challenges in the arena Collins establishes Rue as Katniss' sister-in-combat, one who is promising and creative, but in age and experience quite unfairly pitted against much stronger opponents.

Sisters in a struggle



Empathy, transference, projection

- Through Rue's death in support of Katniss, and our heroine's ceremonial burial of Rue, Collins establishes a real connection between the two demonstrating that Katniss sees her own plight and Rue's as one in the same.
- Indeed Rue is described by Collins as very much like Katniss' own real sister Prim, whom she entered the game to save. Rue's death then is doubly disturbing to Katniss and marks the futility of their alliance and even of sisterhood in the face of the oppression which all district people suffer.
- Indeed Rue receives the fate that Katniss' real sister Prim would have met had she not been rescued by her older sister.
- "To Kill a Mockingjay"

Symbolic salute



Rebellion, resistance, symbolism

- "Rue was more than a piece in their Games and so am I!" – *The Hunger Games* novel
- When Katniss ceremonially "buries" Rue and displays her 3-sign to the audience she sparks a riot-response in Rue's district; one known for its darker skinned people. In the film we see rioting dark as well as lighter- skinned individuals attacking peace keepers and destroying property.
- The posture and gesture of resistance Katniss strikes for the arena cameras is reminiscent of various historical moments of resistance for African Americans .

Symbolic Salute



- In this way Collins imports the collective emotional struggle, the despair and hope of contemporary African American and minority underclasses and channels it through Katniss' experience.
- While a superficial juxtaposition of this moment with that of African American freedom fighters can be problematic, within the construct of the film the analogy holds well.

LA, Watts, District 11



Reaction, response, retaliation

- While Collins appears to be most comfortable addressing issues of class in *The Hunger Games*, this sequence in the film certainly ties Katniss' experience to that of African Americans and other minorities in the US.
- The resulting rioting led by Rue's father in District 11 is reminiscent of the public reaction to the verdicts of the four police officers in the Rodney King trial and the subsequent 1992 LA Riots.
- The inclusion of the riot scene was made in the film where a much subtler gift of bread from District 11 was made to Katniss in the book.

LA, Watts, District 11



- This spectacle in turn echoes numerous riots and protests across the decades from those in reaction to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King to the many victims of police brutality.
- The people of District 11 infuriated by the injustice, though completely aware of the dominant military-police force of the Capitol chose, through violence to demonstrate their feelings of hopelessness and anger at a system that senselessly murders their youngest and most innocent.

LA , Watts, District 11



- In turn the District 11-ers spectacularly demonstrate that at least momentarily that they are completely un'rule'able and that the Capitol is powerless to stop them. It is an intense if fleeting expression of limited power that is brought to bear on the property that they do not own and the space they have no real power to control.
- Here the film shows the potential to educate the teeming sub urban all-american youth about the plight of those of other races and classes in America faced with economic hardship and with little access to fair treatment before the law.

Gladiatorial combat

Spectacular violence



- We find a parallel for combat between the tributes in contemporary America where minority youth murder each other in spectacular fashion with weapons made available to them by larger society.
- In a misguided quest for respect and for mastery of their space and their means youth destroy each other in very public fashion.
- Parade the most problematic aspects of themselves as highly stylized and commodified cultural products for the media machine through forms such as Hip Hop.
- And while these youth are not physically forced to do so, internalized self-hatred and pressure to project strength in the absolute lack of opportunity drives many to engage in such acts.

Gladitorial Combat

Combat across color lines



- The murder of innocent youth can be applied to the recent case of Trayvon Martin in which an older white-hispanic self appointed neighborhood watchman pursued, engaged and fatally shot and unarmed seventeen year old in a gated Florida community.
- the protection of the gated community from intruders or outsiders,
- the patrolling with the use of ultimate force and
- the racial profiling;
- The darker-skinned Trayvon complete with hoody struck the profile of menace and of threat for his attacker George Zimmerman, who even though commanded not to engage the individual by Florida police took matters into his own hands.



- The seventeen year old Trayvon becomes a victim of the arena in much the same way that Rue and the other youth are in *The Hunger Games*. Through no fault other than the odds of sheer circumstance he is thrust into a situation in which he is to use what limited communication and combat skills he has to fight for his life; a fight which he ultimately lost.
- Zimmerman himself for all the calls for his immediate indictment and arrest in an odd twist becomes a victim of the imbalanced social and economic system that he believes requires him to attempt to police using racially biased judgment systems .
- The Stand Your Ground law upon which Zimmerman was left free for almost a month is reminiscent of the ever-shifting rules of the arena, which are arbitrarily changed by the game-makers as contestants struggle to keep pace with the game. The rules always advantage the house and exploit the players, in the case of Zimmerman and Martin consistently supporting a status quo that values European-white safety over minority life in all cases and at all costs.
- The seekers of justice who through mobilization use the media spectacle to force the hand of authorities to have Zimmerman indicted. Protesters of all colors deracialize and decriminalize the hoody and re-deploy it as a unifying symbol of resistance. Much as the 3-sign and Mockingjay become symbols of resistance in Panem.

Teen interpretations...



- How does Collins' audience receive and interpret such messages?
- Is the 3-Sign then the latest in a series of pop-cult expressions that signify only 'cool' sophistication and pubescent rebellion among suburban teens
- Do teens grasp the deeper meanings of the symbolism of the gesture, and of class and race as presented in the book and film?



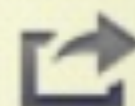
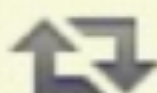
jashper paras

@jashperparas

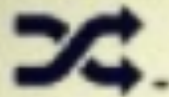


Kk call me racist but when I found out rue was black her death wasn't as sad [#ihatemyself](#)

3 hours ago via Twitter for BlackBerry®



EVERY DAY
I'M



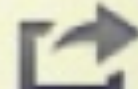
John Knox IV

@johnnyknoxIV



I was pumped about the Hunger Games. Until I learned that a black girl was playing Rue.

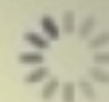
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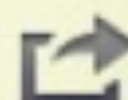
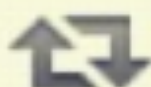
Roxie Browning

@rox_ie



@LexieBrowning what?!!!! Rue is definitely not black. I didn't even know that. #pissed. So is cinna

45 minutes ago via Twitter for iPhone





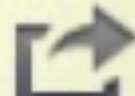
Maggie McDonnell

@maggie_mcd11

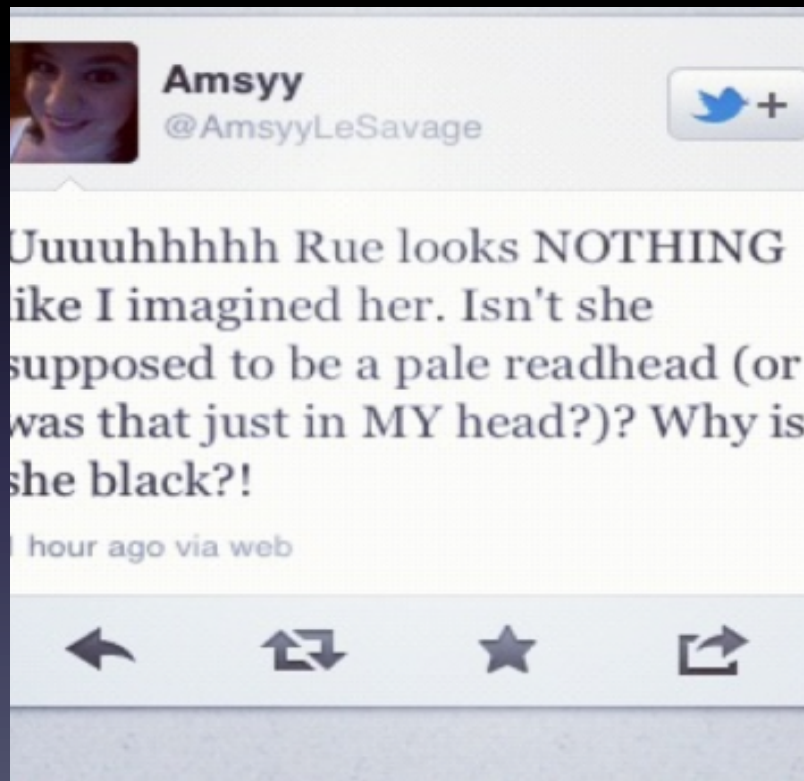


why does rue have to be black not
gonna lie kinda ruined the movie

6 minutes ago via txt



Impossible Innocence



- What do these reactions to the casting of Rue and Cinna reflect?
- How can the youngest generations of fans of a genre that is supposed to be as forward looking as sci-fi hold such perspectives on race?
- How can the novels and film be so powerfully interpreted on the one hand and other be so superficially understood?
- Does the medium of the internet simply aid in the retribalizing of groups, who while shy to express such sentiments in public, broadcast them loudly in cyberspace.

Impossible innocence

Rue: impossibly African American



- *"And most hauntingly, a twelve-year-old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like Prim in size and demeanor."* — Katniss Everdeen, while watching Rue's reaping

African Ambiguity



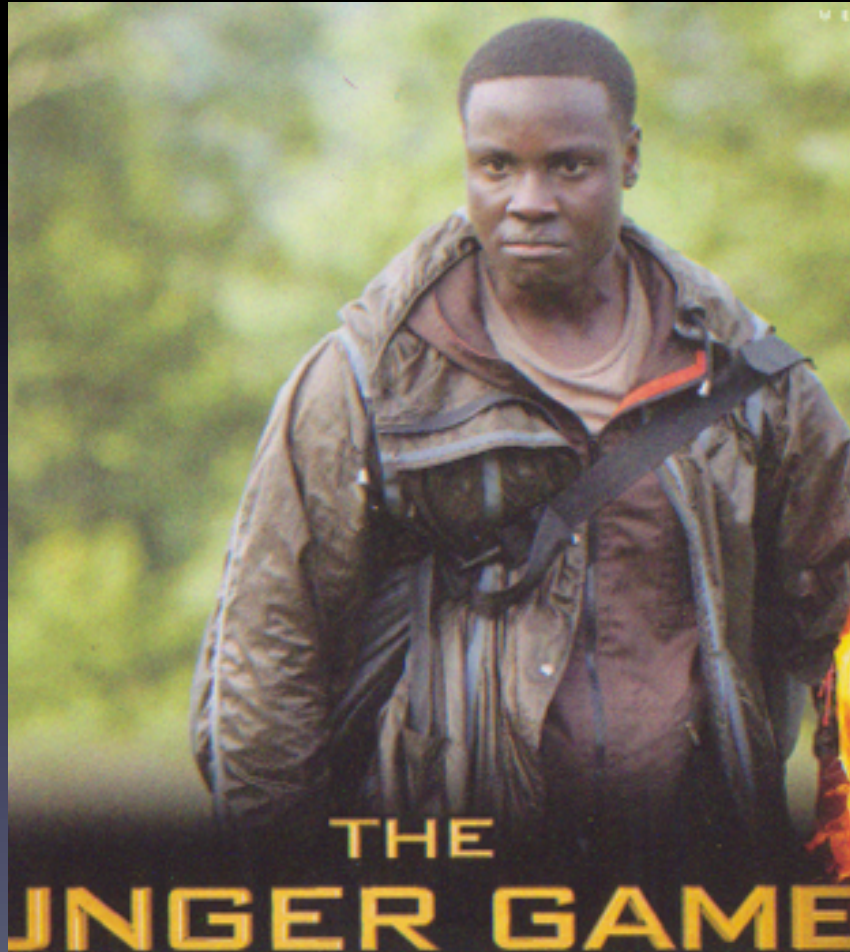
- Does the book's very vague treatment of race; its lack of explicit exploration of the subject encourage readers to overlook the issue entirely and revert to the privileged assumptions that all characters by default are white?
- While the novel does mention that characters, Rue and even Cinna have dark/darker skin and brown hair and that there are districts with a concentration of brown people, she does little to address or suggest why that is case.

Authentic or inauthentic?



- These issues are compounded when the book is adapted to film and the project becomes subject to the various industry pressures for commercial success.
- Does the casting of Rue and Cinna as 'black' or 'African Panemian' then come across to some audiences as an empty feint to multiculturalism or a thinly veiled effort at tapping urban-chic for the box office?
- Or does it reflect a genuine desire to explore race as one of the many layers of intersecting oppressions in a post apocalyptic North America?

Ambiguity



- “When science fiction writers, white or not, include racial issues in their fiction, they enter a territory bounded on one side by readers who feel that the work does not go far enough to address the social ills of the culture they write in and on the other by readers who think it goes too far.” – Elizabeth Anne Leonard
- According to Leonard editor of *Into Darkness* *Peering* many sci fi works which feature racial difference plot-wise fail to examine “how a non-racist society comes into being and how members of minority cultures or ethnic groups preserve their culture.”.

Color blindness



- By far the majority of science fiction deals with racial tension by ignoring it. In many books the characters' race is either not mentioned and probably assumed to be white or, if mentioned, is irrelevant to the events of the story and functions only as an additional descriptor, such as hair color or height.
- Other science fiction assumes a world in which there has been substantial racial mingling and the characters all have ancestry of multiple races.
- These kinds of writing can be seen as an attempt to deal with racial issues by imagining a world where they are non-issues, where color-blindness is the norm.
- This may be a conscious model for a future society, or a gesture to 'political correctness' by an author whose interests in the story lie elsewhere. – Elizabeth Anne Leonard.

Sci-Fi and Race

Samuel R. Delaney



- African American author, professor and literary critic, inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2002.
- Racism is a system. As such, it is fueled as much by chance as by hostile intentions and equally the best intentions as well.
- It is whatever systematically acclimates people, of all colors, to become comfortable with the isolation and segregation of the races, on a visual, social, or economic level—which in turn supports and is supported by socio-economic *discrimination*.
- Because it is a system, however, I believe personal guilt is almost never the proper response in such a situation. Certainly, personal guilt will never replace a bit of well-founded systems analysis. -Samuel R. Delany

Speculation for Liberation



- Even if race and the color line are man-made, they are political realities given value by science fiction writers that must now be reconsidered and reinterpreted by present generations of sf scholars.
- To transcend various repetitions of the color line—black and white, yellow and white, brown and white, red and white—we must be conscious of these repetitions.
- Such a consciousness can only be acquired by exploring the possible worlds of science fiction literature, television, and film and lifting blacks, Asians, Latin Americans, and indigenous peoples out from the background of this historically white genre.

Speculation for Liberation



- Reexamining the background of science fiction may have a significant cultural effect for the twenty-first century because it can prepare us for the looming cultural changes that are descending upon us as the western world ceases to be dominated by the white majority.
- Science fiction has charted a few of the alternatives for this unknown territory, and the perhaps alarming change presents both opportunities and challenges for society to establish new values. In this regard, science fiction criticism is essential for stimulating appreciation of diversity. – *Isaiah Lavender*