

**MAINE
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL**

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**SUMMER
2021**

JOIN THE DISCUSSION



Art: Samuel Rodriguez

Afrofuturism & Africanfuturism

Over the next two years, Maine Humanities Council programming will focus on Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. Our staff have enthusiastically taken the first leap. For some of us, this focus has meant turning to texts we know and love; for others of us, it has meant stepping into something unfamiliar and new. To really champion this programmatic work, we wanted to make sure that everyone on staff has some foundational knowledge about the genre, as well as a basic and fundamental understanding of the Black historical context of the genre and its significance to Black people – readers, creatives, and everyone in between. We wanted to make sure everyone on staff had a solid sense of the impact Afrofuturism has had on the broader genre of sci-fi and speculative fiction. Why not use the tools at our disposal to get at this learning?

This summer, Maine Humanities Council staff is engaging in our first ever staff Discussion Project! We're spending the summer reading and discussing three texts: Ytasha Womack's *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (the graphic novel), and *Bloodchild* – Butler's short story collection.

Creative Futures

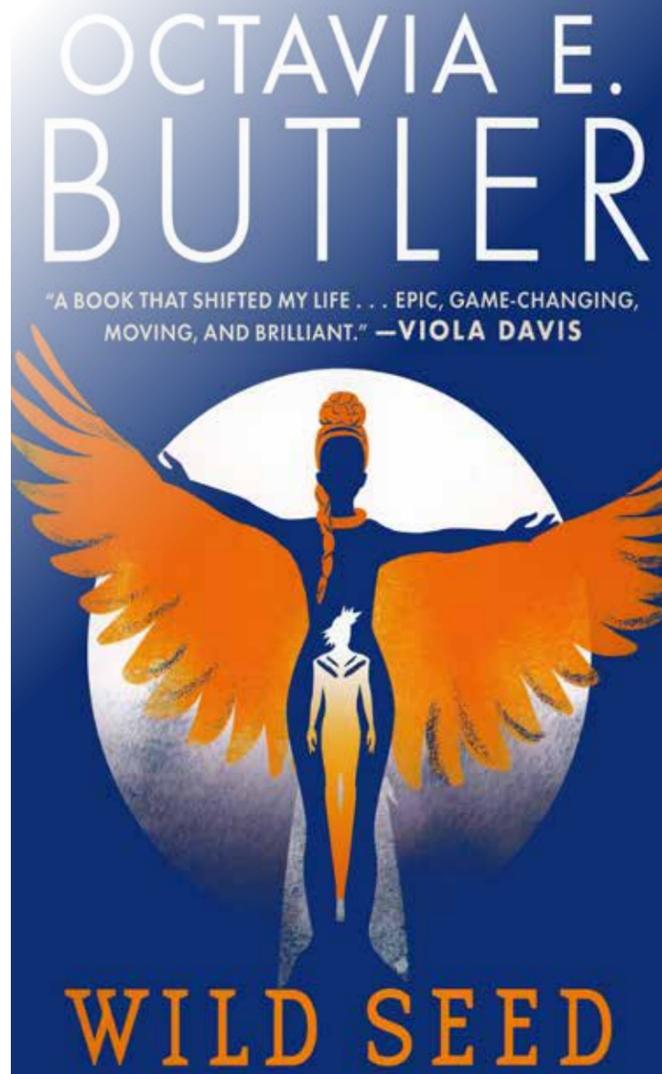
As an aesthetic, Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism bridges art, literature, and music. As a literary genre, Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist texts address a wide range of humanity issues: war, genocide, oppression, spirituality, history, illness, plague, philosophy – and tackles them in a variety of settings: new worlds created by the author; worlds that are future or past iterations of the time and place we inhabit now; worlds that are parallel to, but different from our current world.

Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist fiction lets us ask, what if...? Over the next year, the Maine Humanities Council will begin highlighting Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism in a variety of ways.

In 2022, Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed* will be the featured book at Readers Retreat, our annual deep dive into one incredible book. We've also created an Afrofuturism & Africanfuturism featured reads list for our Discussion Projects. Beginning with Portland-born writer Pauline Hopkins's novel *Of One Blood* (1902), it carries us into 1980 with Butler's *Wild Seed*, and leaves us in the present, with writers like Justina Ireland and Nnedi Okorafor.

Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism begins with the premise that there can be a future for Black and African-descended people that either begins with or provides a clear pathway towards Black liberation. For all of us, the genre opens doorways to new ways to engage with natural environments, new ways to create community, and new ways to survive and thrive.

What if...?



The State of OUR STORY

In July, Maine's governor ended the state's pandemic State of Emergency. Now we face the challenge of consolidating what we've learned over the past year and half, and continuing to learn as we meet and respond to the world as we find it now.

We learned that whether people meet in person or online, being able to meet at all matters very, very much.

We also saw that for some people, facing barriers to using or accessing digital tools, meeting in person really is the best or only way to gather for a discussion. And we also saw that for some people, separated by distance and other barriers to travel, meeting online is the best or only way.

And we learned again, anew, that gathering in itself does not guarantee a rich discussion. We are constantly looking for ways to foster genuine, reciprocal communication. Right now, we're finding that starting a meeting by breathing and finding the ground gives people time to settle; that people often welcome the invitation to really listen to what others are saying; and that they often feel freed to speak by the invitation to contribute imperfectly.

This fall, people will for the first time be able to host our programs either online or in person – choosing the way of meeting that works best for them. We are so grateful to be able to keep learning, every day, among the extraordinary people living their lives in this place we call Maine.

WAYS to JOIN

People and organizations across Maine host Discussion Projects, Maine Speaks, and Poetry Express events, and our grants support a wide variety of projects and programs – all aiming to foster real discussion about things that matter.

Join the discussion. Participate in a project or program near you.

Create a new opportunity for discussion. Apply for a program or a grant.

Donate. Help connect communities with books, poetry, and big ideas.

Upcoming

**Maine Speaks
Fall Programs**
Applications due August 27

**Discussion Project
Fall Programs**
Start September

Spring Applications
Open September 23

**Grants
Mini Grants**
Proposals due September 2

Major Grants
Open October 18

Arts & Humanities
Proposals due October 14

**The Big Question
What if...?**
Saturday, November 6