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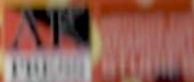
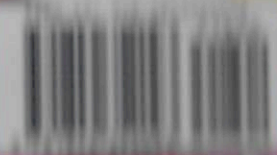
"Those concerned with justice and liberation must always persuade the mass of people that a better world is possible.... In Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha's visionary conception, and by its activist artists' often stunning acts of creative inception, *Octavia's Brood* makes for great thinking and damn good reading. The rest will be up to us." —Jazz Urean, author of *Who We Be: The Colorization of America*

Whenever we envision a world without war, without prisons, without capitalism, we are producing visionary fiction. Organizers and activists envision, and try to create, such worlds all the time. This book brings twenty of them together in the first anthology of short stories to explore the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. The visionary tales of *Octavia's Brood* span genres—sci fi, fantasy, horror, magical realism—but all are united by an attempt to experiment with new ways of understanding ourselves, the world around us, and all the selves and worlds that could be. The collection is rounded off with essays by Yvonne Dier and Mumia Abu-Jamal, and a foreword by Sherie Beale Thomas.

"Our radical imaginations are under siege and this text is the room within." —Bria Bousam, professor of African American Studies, Princeton University

"Octavia once told me that two things worried her about the future of humanity: The tendency to think hierarchically, and the tendency to place ourselves higher on the hierarchy than others. I think she would be humbled beyond words that the fine, thoughtful writers in this volume have honored her with their hearts and minds." —Breya Barnes, author of *Em's Blood*

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OCTAVIA'S BROOD



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SCIENCE FICTION
STORIES FROM
SOCIAL JUSTICE
MOVEMENTS

edited by
ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN
and
WALIDAH IMARISHA



OCTAVIA'S BROOD:
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edited by
Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown

Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements
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AK Press
674-A 23rd Street
Oakland, CA 94612
www.akpress.org
akpress@akpress.org
510.208.1700

AK Press UK
P.O. Box 12766
Edinburgh EH8 9YE
www.akuk.com
ak@akedin.demon.co.uk
0131.555.5165

Institute for Anarchist Studies
www.anarchiststudies.org
anarchiststudies@gmail.com

To Octavia E. Butler, who serves as a north star for so many of us. She told us what would happen—"all that you touch you change"—and then she touched us, fearlessly, brave enough to change us. We dedicate this collection to her, coming out with our own fierce longing to have our writing change everyone and everything we touch.

“I am not going to
die, I’m going home like a
shooting star.”

—Sojourner Truth

FOREWORD

BIRTH OF A REVOLUTION

SHEREE RENÉE THOMAS

“We believe it is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future.”

—*Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown*

IN 1963 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. CAUTIONED US ABOUT ADDING “deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.”¹ He wrote that darkness cannot drive out darkness, that hate cannot drive out hate, and he reminded us that only love can do that. Thirty years later, Octavia E. Butler wrote in her novel *Parable of the Sower* that our “destiny is to take root among the stars.”² The activist and the artist seem at first to have been engaged in markedly different lifework, yet they embraced a shared dream for the future. Their work is linked by faith and a fusion of spiritual teachings and social consciousness, a futuristic social gospel. In its essence, social justice work, which King embodied and Butler expressed so skillfully in her novels and stories, is about love—a love that has the best hopes and wishes for humanity at heart.

Today social justice represents one of the most serious challenges to the conscience of our world. New technology and corporate political policies make it possible to accumulate wealth and power in

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 47.

2 Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Four Walls, Eight Windows, 1993), 77.

startling, fantastic ways, while widening the gulf between those who have and those who don't. In America and in the big beautiful world beyond, the gulf widens perversely, making a mockery of freedom, justice, democracy, and even mercy. James Baldwin said that we are not born knowing what these concepts mean, that they are neither common nor well defined. If we "individuals must make an enormous effort to arrive at the respect for other people that these words imply," as he wrote, then our communities must make a sustained and concentrated effort to create societies that reflect that same sense of respect and meaning.³

The stories in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* represent a global quest for social transformation, for justice. They are about people from different backgrounds and worlds, expanding the notions of solidarity and community, redefining service, and exploring and rediscovering the human spirit in baffling times, under challenging circumstances. The writers collected here offer stories that explore a broad range of social justice issues, from urban gentrification, bioterrorism, racism, and militarism to motherhood, environmentalism, spiritual journeys, and psychological quests. Culled from artists who in their other lives work tirelessly as community activists, educators, and organizers, these stories incite, inspire, engage. If the purpose of a writer, as Toni Cade Bambara said, "is to make revolution irresistible," these writers, these stories represent.⁴ With incisive imagination and a spirited sense of wonder, the contributors bridge the gap between speculative fiction and social justice, boldly writing new voices and communities into the future.

A trickster, teacher, chaos, and clay, God, as described by Octavia E. Butler in her Parable novels, is change, and *Octavia's Brood* is an important resource in our journey toward positive cultural and institutional change. May it spawn new conversations in classrooms, inspire vigorous discussion in coffeehouses and book clubs, and create new organizing tools and "case studies" for strategizing in our community organizations.⁵

³ James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 156.

⁴ Toni Cade Bambara, interview with Kate Bonetti (Columbia, MO: American Audio Prose Library, 1982).

⁵ For more information, see *Octavia's Brood*, <http://www.octaviasbrood.com/>.

INTRODUCTION

WALIDAH IMARISHA

WHENEVER WE TRY TO ENVISION A WORLD WITHOUT WAR, WITHOUT violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science fiction. Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds—so what better venue for organizers to explore their work than science fiction stories? That is the premise behind the book you hold in your hands.

In the years we have been working on this book, many folks have asked us what science fiction could possibly have to do with social justice organizing. And every time, we have responded, "Everything. *Everything*." We want organizers and movement builders to be able to claim the vast space of possibility, to be birthing visionary stories. Using their everyday realities and experiences of changing the world, they can form the foundation for the fantastic and, we hope, build a future where the fantastic liberates the mundane.

We titled this collection in honor of Black science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler. Butler explored the intersections of identity and imagination, the gray areas of race, class, gender, sexuality, love, militarism, inequality, oppression, resistance, and—most important—hope. Her work has taught us so much about the principles of visionary fiction, inspiring us. The title plays on Butler's three novel collection, *Lilith's Brood*, which is about adaptation as a necessity for survival. Changes will occur that we cannot even begin to imagine, and the next generation will be both utterly familiar and wholly alien to their parents. We believe this is what it means to carry on Butler's legacy of writing visionary fiction.

“Visionary fiction” is a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice. We believe this space is vital for any process of decolonization, because the decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive form there is: for it is where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless.

This anthology of visionary fiction contains short stories from people who have dedicated their lives to making change. It also includes pieces from well-known science fiction writers Tananarive Due, Terry Bisson, LeVar Burton, and Kalamu ya Salaam, and from award-winning journalist and political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal (who writes here about *Star Wars* and imperialism).

The process for creating this anthology was unlike any either of us editors had been involved with before, one that was both very intensive and highly collaborative. We worked with contributors over the course of many rounds of edits to pull out the visionary aspects of their incredible stories, as well as to ensure that the writing and storytelling captivated and inspired. We appreciate immensely the countless hours each writer poured into this creation of love. And we both feel lucky beyond words that we had the support and advice of the incredible Sheree Renée Thomas, who edited the groundbreaking anthology *Dark Matter: 100 Years of Speculative Fiction From the African Diaspora*.

Many of the contributors to *Octavia's Brood* had never written fiction before, let alone science fiction. When we approached folks, most were hesitant to commit, feeling like they weren't qualified. But overwhelmingly, they all came back a few weeks later, enthusiastically, with incredible ideas and some with dozens of pages already written. Because all organizing is science fiction, we are dreaming new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make in the world. The writers in this collection just needed a little space, and perhaps permission to immerse themselves fully in their visionary selves.

We especially wanted to make space for people whose identities are marginalized and oppressed within mainstream society. Art and

culture themselves are time-traveling, planes of existence where the past, present, and future shift seamlessly in and out. And for those of us from communities with historic collective trauma, we must understand that each of us is already science fiction walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us. For adrienne and myself, as two Black women, we think of our ancestors in chains dreaming about a day when their children's children's children would be free. They had no reason to believe this was likely, but together they dreamed of freedom, and they brought us into being. We are responsible for interpreting their regrets and realizing their imaginings. We wish to continue the work of moving forward with their visionary legacy.

At a retreat for women writers in 1988, Octavia E. Butler said that she never wanted the title of being the solitary Black female sci-fi writer. She wanted to be one of *many* Black female sci-fi writers. She wanted to be one of thousands of folks writing themselves into the present and into the future. We believe in that right Butler claimed for each of us—the right to dream as ourselves, individually and collectively. But we also think it is a responsibility she handed down: are we brave enough to imagine beyond the boundaries of “the real” and then do the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams?