

## **W.E.B DuBois and Afrofuturism - by Dr. Judith Smith**

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic philosophy of science and history that focuses on the intersection of the African diaspora's culture, science, and technology (Strait et al., 2023). In the exhibit entitled Afrofuturism, currently on exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the curators credited DuBois as an afrofuturist. They cite Chapter 10 of *Darkwater: Voices from the Veil*, which recounts in a short fictional story, "The Comet," the grizzly coming of Halley's Comet and its ravishing effect on New York City. The comet's toxic gases kill everyone except Jim, a Black man, and Julia, a wealthy White woman. Their venture to find their families leaves them vulnerable to emotion until a voice of reality hits Jim with the single N-word, called out by a White man. Jim is spared lynching as he had saved Julia's life. Their eyes never met again.

Elia (2016) postulated that by portraying Jim as a Black man, DuBois engages in Black speculative fiction, a characterization of Afrofuturism. DuBois reimagines the past and future of African Americans to articulate a historical and diasporic narrative (Womack, 2013). Ogbunu (2020) argued that DuBois' "foray into fantasy in 1920" bluntly takes a stance on racism's inevitability and lays the foundation for Afrofuturism. Metaphorically, a century later, a comet carrying disease and social unrest is upending the world and revealing still-existing racism. Afrofuturism can help guide us "out of rubble" toward better alternatives. DuBois' is quoted in the exhibit:

The Negro is sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world (DuBois, 1903).

DuBois approached the story as a parable, with the supernatural element of the comet to speculate on racial discrimination, prejudices, and the chasm of the status quo (Elia, 2014).

## References

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