

White liberals stay predicting dystopias caused by whiteness—without doing anything about it



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○ [CULTURE](#), [ENTERTAINMENT](#), [FEATURED](#), [RACE](#)

Westworld via HBO

Even in correctly diagnosing their society's ills, they refuse to call it **theirs**

-@HariZiyad

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Editor's Note: This piece is excerpted from a talk I did for Cal State LA's Black Future Series in February. Though I love poetry, I usually avoid readings when there aren't many artists of color on the bill. But recently I went to just that type of event in support of a friend who was the only Black poet being featured. I knew my worst expectations would be confirmed when the one other Black audience member didn't give a head nod back when we met each other's eyes after taking our seats.

Although also a prime example of why I do not go to these things, one of the white performers in particular caught my attention. He was what I guess you could call "experimental," creating poetry through sound repetition. I couldn't quite understand the draw, but he certainly seemed to feel as though he was doing something spectacular.

At one point, he interrupted his far-too-long set to muse about how he believes that eventually people will have no use for audio or visual language. At some point, we will upload our thoughts and communications to a cloud, he predicted, destroying the need.

His prediction reminded me of a time about a year or so ago, when a white writer excitedly told me about a talk he'd heard from Elon Musk, the white South African inventor of SpaceX and Tesla, assuming I'd appreciate it due to my sci-fi fandom. He was fascinated by Musk's assertion that the odds are that we are currently living in a simulation. "If you assume any rate of improvement at all then games will become indistinguishable from reality," Musk argued, "even if that rate of advancement drops by a thousand from what it is now, let's just imagine it's 10,000 years in the future, which is nothing on the evolutionary scale." Because we are already on that trajectory, Musk said, the odds that some part of human civilization hasn't already created this simulated reality and placed us into it is one in billions.

What stood out was how both of these predictions were made (and, in the case of Musk, reported on) with such glee. It was almost as if, to these white folks, dystopia was an exciting endeavor. It certainly wasn't one they were interested in steering us away from. They had already written off the possibility. We are technocapitalists at the expense of everything else. This is what we do.

In a recent discussion, my friend Preston Anderston posited that white people "can understand the destruction of the planet before the destruction of the white world," and perhaps nothing exemplifies this better than their dystopian imaginings. To them, there is no world without whiteness, so even if they acknowledge the hell whiteness necessarily brings, there is no other future possible than that hell.

This is also evident in their imaginings of dystopian futures brought about by white supremacist technocapitalism in recent television shows like Netflix's *Black Mirror*, HBO's *Westworld*, and Amazon's *Electric Dreams*. Each is dark, maddening, bleak, and some of the most exciting TV today. Each shows us that, were the world to continue down this road, it is doomed for failure.

Black viewers who are drawn to these stories, I believe, are drawn in part because we know the road the world continues spinning upon is cobbled with Black bodies. We know that when technological advancements are driven by the greed of capitalism, it is our exploited labor and lives that have made this possible. We know that if and when nativist regimes finally do turn their authoritarian violence inward, it is only because they looked away while tyranny was perfected on our bones.

And so we relish the small screen downfalls of societies that seem to have yet to answer for their brutality in the real world. Through the series' creators, we at least receive some sort of apology in the form of projected self-implosion.

But ultimately this is just another show of white tears, at best, and the solution-less "I'm smarter than you" musings of self-important white liberal artists and poets, at worst. In these liberal dystopian futures, hopelessness is totalizing and titillating. *None of us* can survive society's implosion, so we might as well enjoy it.

What's most telling is how easily these artists tend to universalize culpability. In the aforementioned TV shows, Black people often "take the place" of white people as supremacist-like oppressors (see *Electric Dreams* episode 6). In the poet and Musk's vision of the future, *we are all* hellbent on technological advancement regardless of the damage it does to the world. Even in correctly diagnosing their society's ills, they refuse to call it *theirs*, discounting their responsibility and all of the alternative world-building work that we as Black people in particular do outside of their technocapitalist systems.

Only *this* world is irredeemable and destined for dystopia, and, in fact, dystopia is now for Black people. Unlike the white imagination, which gives up on the future to sustain what is now, we can give up on *what is now* for the possibility of the future. Black possibilities.

Ultimately, white liberal dystopian projections aren't cautionary tales about nativism and hyper capitalism, but an embrace of complicity. Let them build consciousness in clouds and live in simulations and become robots or get their minds stuck in holograms without us. We have done enough suffering. And because their future demands it, our suffering can only end if we refuse to believe our destinies are intertwined.

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