

**Interview of Dr. Isiah Lavender III,
Sterling Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia**

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5 Kimberly Williams: Okay. My name is Kimberly Williams of the University of Florida and I
6 am interviewing Dr. Isiah Lavender. [tsk] Today is January the 30th. We
7 are in Orlando at the University of Central Florida and this is part of the
8 Zora Neale Hurston Festival and Conference. [tsk] So if you could state,
9 um, your name.
10
11 Isiah Lavender: Okay. I'm Isiah...
12
13 Kimberly Williams: Yes.
14
15 Isiah Lavender: ...Lavender the III.
16
17 Kimberly Williams: Yes. [laughter] Awesome. [0:29] And can you tell me a little bit about
18 yourself and how you came into this work of Afrofuturism?
19
20 Isiah Lavender: Oh, my goodness. That is, uh, a simple, complex question all in one.
21 Right? So, um, let me go with my standard answer. Uh, [tsk], my earliest
22 memory is *Star Wars* and, uh, I remember seeing Han Solo, uh, shoot
23 Greedo first, this fantastic green-skinned character, uh, in *Star Wars*, the
24 very first *Star Wars*, not *A New Hope* as it's labeled number 4 but *Star*
25 *Wars*. Right? And I remember being thrilled by seeing Greedo's, uh,
26 metallic green skin and thinking oh, that's pretty interesting. This is me in
27 1977. I'm 3 years old. I saw it at, uh, the [Angle 1:17], uh, Drive-In in, in
28 Upstate New York. Right? Uh, and so, uh, it's a, it's an important memory
29 to me because, you know, it's, it's my earliest one and, uh, I can remember
30 the trash compactor scene and falling asleep and...
31
32 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
33
34 Isiah Lavender: ...waking up in my dad's arms as he carried me into our house, uh, in a, a
35 light misting rain. And so that green skin stuck with me. Uh, I can relate it
36 to movies even more when I think about *Blade Runner* and, uh, the
37 voiceover where c-, uh, the captain, uh, [Inaudible 1:53] Deckard's
38 character said well this is the kind of cop that referred to, uh, skinjobs or
39 the replicants in the film, uh, as, as niggers. And I'm like oh, my gosh.
40 And well what's that? But then I had, uh, an awareness and a, a racial
41 awakening, uh, sometime in between 2nd and 3rd grade when I used to
42 like running against the bus. And in the morning, I mouthed off to some
43 4th graders 'cause I had a, a fast tongue and what I thought were faster
44 feet. [laughter] And so I forgot that moment and then I got off at the bus, 3
45 feet of snow in February, uh, and I tried to race the, uh, the bus in my Blue
46 Moon Boots and I lost the race...

1
2Kimberly Williams: Hm.
3
4Isiah Lavender: ...and, uh, the 4th graders had gotten off the bus and, uh, uh, [tsk], uh,
5 they circled me, called me a nigger and kicked the crap outta me in my
6 front yard and I was in one of those fetal balls trying to protect myself.
7 Uh, bus driver got off the bus, saved my life when she came back around.
8 'Cause, you know, kids can go too far. And so...
9
10Kimberly Williams: Yes.
11
12Isiah Lavender: ...I remember bloody – leaving a Moon Boot behind, uh, and getting into
13 the front door, uh, and asking my mom later, “Mom, what's a nigger?”
14 And so...
15
16Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
17
18Isiah Lavender: ...uh, it was big brouhaha at the school as you can imagine in the, uh,
19 parent-teacher association, uh, and being forced to ride at the front of the
20 bus for the rest of the school year because, uh, they were trying to protect
21 me. And, uh, my dad giving me the *Martian Chronicles*, uh, and my mom
22 giving me the *Martian Chronicles*, one of them and saying read this story
23 way in the middle of the year. Right? So that was a different moment. Uh,
24 uh, I'm just thinking of science fiction in general at this point. And then,
25 uh, I also suffered from institutionalized racism and didn't know it. In the
26 second grade, I was put in special ed and, uh, my teacher, Mrs. [Ennis
27 3:52], who I thank every moment, uh, said you don't belong here and
28 threw a, a novel called *The Mouse and the Movor-*, *Motorcycle* by Beverly
29 Cleary. Uh, had me into gifted and talented within 6 weeks. And so that,
30 that was another formative moment where it seems like race and science
31 fiction are fantastic literature, has always inextricably been intertwined in my
32 life. And both of my parents were avid readers.
33
34 And so I read all kinds of things that I should not have read, like, uh,
35 *Harlequin Romances*. Johanna Lindsey and Bertrice Small were the big
36 writers. My sister's *Sweet Valley High* books and *Baby-Sitters Club*, Zane
37 Grey and Louis L'amore from, uh, [tsk] Western traditions and, and
38 science fiction and whatever I could get my hands on, like *Chose Your*
39 *Own Adventure*, uh, novels and *Twistaplots* and *Endless Quests*. And so
40 those were the kinds of things that I was reading and playing with my *Star*
41 *Wars* and very different, uh, you know, action figures at that time because
42 they came in multiple sizes and colors and, and, uh, those were interesting
43 times in my childhood. And, um, Afrofuturism for me really doesn't come
44 about unt-, until Milestone Media, uh, in 1992, '93 when I was a freshman
45 at the University of Pittsburgh and, uh, in the Homewood section and
46 going to the comic book shop and say oh, my gosh; this is so cool. Right?

1 And so I know Reynaldo was talking about he's a Marvel man. I, I
2 [laughter] read Marvel too but I was mostly Milestone Media because of,
3 uh, [papers rustling] the 4 comic books that started Milestone Media –
4 *Hardware, Static, Blood Syndicate* and *Icon*.
5
6 And I collected all of them. And I have one of those sad stories about, uh,
7 I – when I would transfer to Southern University for the rest of my
8 undergraduate career. For 3 years, uh, I stayed with my aunt that was there
9 and I left my comics there that I was accruing on a weekly basis. And
10 when she moved, uh, back to Atlanta, she tossed all my stuff out. Right?
11 One a those sad stories 'cause I wish I had that collection. But, uh, you
12 know, uh, uh, Virgil Hawkins from *Static* was really an important, uh,
13 character for me and so I became *Static* shocked. They even gave him a, a,
14 a role on, on the, uh, cartoon series. Right? And so that was kind of, uh,
15 neat because it, it helped me, uh, uh, see black culture in a different way
16 just like, uh, The Blood Syndicate group, uh, and that, that bad guy team
17 up in that novel – right – or villain team up, I should say, was, uh, another
18 way of, of seeing, uh, the world in this city, the Dakotaverse.
19
20 And I'm – you know, I'm realized how strongly, uh, that milestone really
21 influenced my way of, of thinking. But then I was also into reading, uh,
22 [tsk] *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *Narrative of the Life of*
23 *Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and thinking
24 about what that past means for the future. And 18, 19, 20, I didn't know
25 Afrofuturism existed. Uh, so in my first book, *Race in American Science*
26 *Fiction*, I tried to creat other hoods as my idea, uh, to combat
27 Afrofuturism, uh, because I was, uh, [tsk] for lack of a better description,
28 dumb. I'm not gonna let some white guy tag this entire thing for, for
29 people in the world. It should be named by a black person and this is [my
30 attempt 7:42]. And that was just idiotic thinking of a, of a young 20-
31 something working on a dissertation and saying well, no, this is really
32 something and a-, as long as it starts. And, you know, I'm a, a member of
33 the human species and take it out from there, then race is a silly concept in
34 some ways. But...
35
36Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
37
38Isiah Lavender: ...it affects us.
39
40Kimberly Williams: Absolutely. [laughter] Absolutely. Thank you so much for that very
41 thorough and vulnerable [tapping] sort of like trajectory, you know, of
42 [you c- 8:14]...
43
44Isiah Lavender: Oh, I, I...
45
46Kimberly Williams: ...[you came 8:15]...

1
2Isiah Lavender: ...try and be as honest as I can in any...
3
4Kimberly Williams: ...[futurism 8:17].
5
6Isiah Lavender: ...situ-...
7
8Kimberly Williams: Yes.
9
10Isiah Lavender:-ation.
11
12Kimberly Williams: Yeah. [8:19] And [laughter] so with that and I know you kind of touched
13 on that already, uh, but anything else have you missed in terms of thinking
14 about how you define Afrofuturism?
15
16Isiah Lavender: Defining Afrofuturism is such a difficult thing. [tsk] It's like trying to, to
17 define science fiction.
18
19Kimberly Williams: Hm.
20
21Isiah Lavender: And so I would go with the idea that you know it when you see it and
22 that's why we have lots of people responding to, uh, *Black Panther* the
23 way that they have. Right? And when my 8-year-old says I wanna be a
24 rhino rider, I'm like wow, this is a really powerful thing that I've been
25 studying that has gone all of – filtered all the way down to my 8-year-old's
26 mind in 2018 and he – you know, he's almost 10 now. Right? But that was
27 an amazing statement to me. So when I, when I think of Afrofuturism, the
28 definition that I like, uh, is, is, uh, uh, science fictional blackness, uh, uh,
29 eh, in line with what Greg Tate says in the founding – uh, interview with,
30 with Mark Derry in *Black to the Future* where, uh, uh, uh, black people
31 live a science fictional existence. And then you expand on that with the
32 idea that well, uh, blacks were stolen by foreign people, alien people,
33 taken to, uh, an alien environment in alien ships, forced to speak alien
34 languages, uh, and live in alien existence.
35
36 If that's not science fiction, I don't know what is. Right? And so that's a-,
37 another definition. As I was trying to think my way through Afrofuturism,
38 I'd – you know, I wrote my book, uh, uh, *Afrofuturism Rising* and came up
39 with ideas, uh, at least new ideas and concepts to me, such as the
40 networked black consciousness, which was not my own – right – that I just
41 developed it further than [Inaudible 10:11], at least in my opinion. And
42 then, uh, the idea of, of, uh, uh, the trans-historic feedback loop, uh, where
43 this history is informing the present, informing the future and it goes in
44 cycles in tandem with something like the, uh, uh, hyperreal violence loop,
45 which we can trace ad infinitum all the way back to, uh, the first Africans
46 rise up, at least as we say, *The 1619 Project*, the first Africans arriving in

1 the New World. Of course, they were here before that but, uh, you can see
2 the violence, uh, uh, inflicted on black bodies from then...
3
4 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
5
6 Isiah Lavender: ...all the way up and through 20-, uh, let's say January 30, 2020, 'cause it's
7 happening to someone...
8
9 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
10
11 Isiah Lavender: ...that looks like us somewhere...
12
13 Kimberly Williams: Yes.
14
15 Isiah Lavender: ...right now as we speak. Right? And so, uh, uh, in addition to that, eh,
16 you, you get black people, uh, communicating with each other across time.
17 Maybe it's intertextual across space just through holding an object, like f-,
18 uh, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and seeing how this
19 violence impacts us and how he thinks his way through it into the future
20 and how Harriet Jacobs thinks her way through it into the future and, and
21 how we can apply that now and that provides us with a sense of hope. So I
22 was calling that the hope...
23
24 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
25
26 Isiah Lavender: ...impulse. Some people maybe call it Afrotopia, utopian and then people
27 were, well how is Afrofuturism against Afropessimism and I say oh, no,
28 no, no. Afropessimism falls underneath Afrofuturism because
29 Afrofuturism isn't just about utopia. It's about the way, uh, there are
30 different black worlds projected by black people and their writings. And
31 then I had my mind blown in a, a piece that, uh, Delany did for me in
32 *Beyond Afrofuturism* where, where, you know, he's just, you know, white
33 people can [white 12:06] Afrofuturism because it's, uh, uh, eh, it's images
34 of black characters in black worlds and white writers can do that too. And
35 if we all belong to the same species, as we do, then every-, I mean that's
36 [e-, da- 12:20], but that's really crazy beyond what we think in terms of
37 Afrofuturism, which made it perfect for, uh, the double issues of
38 extrapolation. So I, I don't go that far in my own thinking but, uh, it was
39 said by one of the progenitors of Afrofuturism, so how can Samuel R.
40 Delany be wrong? Magnificent human being.
41
42 Kimberly Williams: That is very true. Yes. [laughter] That is very true. Yes. And again, I, I
43 really love how organically you are offering transitions and bridging into
44 every single of my questions. [laughter] [12:52] So, um, from your
45 perspective, what does Afrofuturism offer society at this moment in terms
46 of, um, maybe it's critique, liberation or opportunity?

1
2 Isiah Lavender: I think it is, uh, critique. It offers critiques of the past in terms of, of how
3 people have lived together, have been treated. I think it provides a way
4 into, uh, the future of race relations. Uh, it's, it's – what do I mean by the
5 future of race relations? I mean how we get along. Like I was I just, uh, in
6 conversation, uh, that Reynaldo, uh, mentioned that book by that, uh, [tsk]
7 Muslim-American and, and, and, you know, he said he name dr-, he forgot
8 the name. Right? The name slipped his mind and I'm oh, that's Omar El
9 Akkad, uh, uh, *American War*, uh, which has a, a black protagonist in it,
10 which is a, a pretty fascinating book when you move forward and you're
11 looking at it and it's in the 2070s, uh...
12
13 Male: Is this...
14
15 Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 14:07]
16
17 Isiah Lavender: No. That's okay. And, and you are projecting into, uh, the future with that
18 novel where you have the Civil War and this, uh, native of what was once
19 Louisiana, a young woman with a long gun takes out the, uh, uh – if I'm,
20 I'm with – takes out the American president of, of the Union and, eh, and
21 that's where it is. I've still have 50 pages left to go in the novel. That's
22 where...
23
24 Kimberly Williams: [Mm-hm 14:36].
25
26 Isiah Lavender: ...[laughter] I'm in it, so I don't quite know where it ends yet but that's,
27 you know, uh, uh, 1 possible future, 1 act of Afrofuturism written by, uh,
28 uh, an Asian-American or a Middle Eastern-American projecting into the
29 future. And I think that's what Delany's talking about because this
30 viewpoint character is, is a, a black girl h-, that, that takes up arms to fight
31 for the South, eh, or the new South in the books. You like wow, this is a
32 fascinating, uh, text and take on it. And so I don't – I've, I've lost the
33 thread of your question but just [laughter] looking at – oh, I've, I've got it
34 back. So it offers glimpses of possible futures and helps us see around
35 issues of race, see around issues of gender, see around, eh, eh, uh, uh,
36 intersectionalities, to use Patricia Hill's Collins' thinking. Right? And so
37 that, that's an important tool and avenue for human beings, uh, uh,
38 surviving as a species. I mean how else – I mean I'm flipping – I'm
39 thinking climate change and things like that now. So if we can't think our
40 way through, uh, uh, our own disagreements, how are we going to combat
41 what we've done to this planet? Oh, uh, the planet'll fight back and, and
42 kill us and then, you know, what species will rise next? Eh, that's – but
43 that's crazy.
44
45 Kimberly Williams: Yes. [laughter] That is true. We have seen that through, oh goodness,
46 cinema and, and life.

1
2Isiah Lavender: Right?
3
4Kimberly Williams: That is, that is [tapping] very true.
5
6Isiah Lavender: Right?
7
8Kimberly Williams: That is true. [16:16] So in your, in your mind, what's the link between –
9 you know, we're at this festival, um, celebrating – [remembering 16:22]
10 Zora Neale Hurston? What's the link between Hurston and Afrofuturism?
11
12Isiah Lavender: [sighing] Well I'm going to talk about that a little bit in my talk, uh,
13 tomorrow. But for me, uh, Hurston is, uh, [tsk] an active agent of
14 Afrofuturism in that she has scientific training with Franz Boas at
15 Columbia University. She has an ear for, uh, uh, native dialects and an
16 interest in capturing stories from her people that represent, uh, uh, the
17 black diaspora in the United States and the Caribbean. And so she uses
18 tape recorders and she uses cameras and takes pictures, these high-end
19 technologies in the early 20th century, uh, to help tell these stories. And
20 then, uh, she listens to them and she projects them in, uh, all of her novels.
21 Right? So *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, uh, and, and the hoodoo that is put on, uh,
22 the main character is, is a fascinating Afrofuturist application when you go
23 beyond the science and technology that is – oh, my air quotes – that,
24 [laughter] that goes, you know – that takes Afrofuturism in a direction that
25 we don't think of in terms of hardcore sciences. When you get into native
26 scientific practices and religious beliefs, that opens up all of her work and
27 so you can see that on display in *Their Eyes Were Watching God's*;
28 *Seraph on the Suwanee*...
29
30Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
31
32Isiah Lavender: ...*Moses, Man of the Mountain* and so – and her short stories. And then so
33 all of it is relevant to what she does. Like I was fascinated by hearing
34 about the, the esoteric traditions. That's a avenue of thought I never, uh,
35 even considered that Reynaldo was, was telling us about in his key note
36 and so, uh, I think she has everything to do with Afrofuturism. I think, uh,
37 uh, after Zora Neale Hurston and before, uh, Octavia Butler that's a –
38 there's a direct linking connection there. Where's the missing link? That's
39 something that I'm...
40
41Kimberly Williams: [Mm-hm 18:34]. [tapping]
42
43Isiah Lavender: ...interested in now, finding that black...
44
45Kimberly Williams: Hm.
46

1Isiah Lavender: ...female author between those 2 writers, eh, 'cause, uh, there has to be.
2

3Kimberly Williams: Absolutely.
4

5Isiah Lavender: And, and so that's, that's something that I'm going to go in search of.
6 Maybe I shouldn't put that on tape but, but I am.
7

8Kimberly Williams: Okay. [laughter] Yeah. Awesome. [18:53] And do you think the Zora
9 Neale Hurston Festival engagement with Afrofuturism continues
10 Hurston's legacy?
11

12Isiah Lavender: Absolutely. And, and I say absolutely because different people are
13 offering different perspectives and different ways of thinking about Zora
14 Neale Hurston's work. You know, it's been read in terms of folklore. It's
15 been read in terms of humor. It's been read in terms of race and gender.
16 Why not what it can mean for future generations? What kinds of future
17 stories, uh, are she te-, is she telling? All right? And, and I, I think of – if
18 we just use *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, uh, it's telling us how people
19 can get together, how, uh, black people themselves, uh, have been
20 humanized by her story and in ways that, uh, mainstream America might
21 not have accepted and, uh, you know, I know Richard Wright didn't
22 accept it when he criticizes Hurston's novel. Uh, but she had a much better
23 ear for dialect that he does in *Native Son* and so the 2 become, uh, enemies
24 in a – of, of sort and so, you know, interesting writers, interesting period.
25

26 But, uh, you know, Hurston's legacy is ongoing because she's cond-, uh, I
27 mean I just listened to that Afrofuturism in Russia connected to Zora
28 Neale Hurston. I was like wow, this is fascinating. So who, eh – her
29 impact is, is still going. It's like a nuclear explosion and we don't know
30 when the radiation of her magnificence is going to end. I hope it doesn't.
31 And so, eh, Zora Neale Hurston Society is doing a fabulous work and
32 thinking about, uh, the context of Hurston's novels and short stories and
33 folklore and journalism and extending that into the future. Keeping,
34 keeping her work alive is impacting future generations even now. And so I
35 f-, I sound like I'm talking in circles but this is that, that time loop that is,
36 is a necessary thing as it's ongoing into the, into, uh, the future and so I
37 can't wait for my own sons to encounter her work so to speak. Yeah.
38

39Kimberly Williams: [21:15] And that's – that actually gets into – and, and of course, you sort
40 of touched on that, um, just now. But really thinking about what can
41 contemporary Afrofuturists learn from Hurston and also early black
42 writers and thinkers and scholars?
43

44Isiah Lavender: Can learn to, uh, listen. I mean I don't mean, yes, you're reading the words
45 on the page. But you're also, you know, creating this little motion picture
46 in your head, eh, this synesthesia, this synesthetic experience that she is

1 producing, uh, like the people on Joe porches – um, on Joe Starks’ porch.
2 Right? Uh, uh, sharing thought pictures, it sounds like telepathy to me.
3 And so I talk about that in my book and I’ll talk about that tomorrow, uh,
4 in our talk or you could switch to like, uh, uh, *Sweat* and Delia Jones and
5 Joe Clarke’s storefront porch and the conversation that’s going on there.
6 You know, it may be in the past but relationships, uh, between the sexes
7 have been around forever and they’ll s-, be around as long as the human
8 species inhabits the earth. And so we can learn about how men and women
9 think about each other and how we can cross the, the biological divide in a
10 sense. And so I think, uh, her work is, is wonderful [and in 22:47] doing
11 this.

12
13 And I, I’ve also believe that there are undiscovered writers, uh, such as,
14 you heard *The Princess Steel* and, and W.E.B. Du Bois’ early work that
15 was recovered by, uh, Adrienne Maree Brown and Britt Rusert. And these
16 earlier things are being discovered all the time. And so what do you, what
17 do you do with that? How do you examine that? What framework do you
18 bring to it? And so it’s like, uh, uh, John Akomofrah’s *Data Thief* in *The*
19 *Last Angel of History*. We’re coming back finding this piece, bringing it
20 into the future and talking about it and, and synthesizing it and, and
21 thinking about the information and the snapshot of, of history, uh, that’s
22 provided and, and how you use that into, uh – take that into the future
23 where you get, uh, uh, uh, a hip hop group like Clipping and their, uh,
24 wonderful slave slip computer love story – oh, I’m forgetting the name of
25 the song. But it, eh, but it’s fantastic and you’re like oh, my gosh. And,
26 and, you know, these artists are reaching into the past, mining it, eh, taking
27 it in the future, flipping it, remixing it, rethinking it and, and saying wow,
28 this is how, uh, we think about the future of race.

29
30 As long as it continues as a concept, Afrofuturism will be useful. Now
31 what can you do with it? It’s, it’s – I think it’s representative of the colored
32 wave of science fiction right now, so, uh, which is, uh, Afrofuturism first
33 and indigenous futurism is taking off. Techno-orientalism or Asian
34 futurisms that have developed from that fear of, of the Yellow Peril back
35 in the, in the late 19th century is taking off, uh, indigenous futurisms. As I,
36 as I’ve already said, it – all of the Latinx futurisms [or 24:41] all of this
37 can be linked back to Afrofuturism in a sense and you can take that back
38 as far as you want and, and probably should. And so, uh, [tsk] in thinking
39 about this, uh, I think about Nnedi Okorafor and, and s-, her resistance to
40 being labeled an Afrofuturist. She is an [Africanfuturist 25:03] – one word
41 – in her thinking and, yet, there’s resistance from the afro-, uh, from the
42 actual African continent. Hey, oh no, Nnedi, you’re a first generation
43 [Nige- 25:14] American – right – you don’t get to tell us what our writing
44 is. And so trying to come up with a label of what...

45
46 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.

1
2 Isiah Lavender: ...science fiction fantasy from the African continent should be called. Eh,
3 it's, uh, you know – these debates can go on, uh, forever and they should.
4 It's a good proper, uh, academic scrum, I guess, [laughter] for lack of a
5 better description. So I love it. I'm, I'm invested in seeing where it goes as
6 long as I'm walking this earth.
7
8 Kimberly Williams: And what I really like about your responses and your answers, it really,
9 [tapping] um, just kind of defines and curates so much around like
10 multisensory, multiethnic, multi theory and it sort of really makes me
11 think about, um, your text in *Rising* too as well. [26:04] Did you want to
12 talk a little bit about that sort of like creation making too?
13
14 Isiah Lavender: Man. [sighing] Well books are, uh, a hard thing. They're, they're not hard
15 but they take a long time as you're sitting there thinking about stuff and
16 distilling your thought and going out and presenting, uh, at various
17 conferences and, and getting feedback and criticism and incorporating all
18 of that into, uh, the production of a book. And so, uh, I purposefully did
19 not want to write about, uh, Delany's work and Butler's work and Steven
20 Barnes' work and Nalo Hopkinson's work, uh, at the time that I was
21 writing because those books have been written. Those scholars – those
22 authors have been written about in terms of science fiction and, and
23 Afrofuturism as well. And I love talking about them. I love reading them.
24 But I've, I've come about to thinking of Afrofuturism as black science
25 fictional experience because of Greg Tate and I decided that, you know,
26 I've taught *Their Eyes Were Watching God* any number of times and it
27 always comes across as a science fictional work to me but that doesn't
28 quite fit it, so Afrofuturism.
29
30 Uh, but I developed my own thinking on Afrofuturism to, uh, kind of fit
31 how I saw *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and, uh, *Native Son* and, uh,
32 [tsk] *Captain Blackman* and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
33 and any number of African-American texts that are not science fiction by
34 any stretch the e-, imagination but are Afrofuturism. And so that to me
35 was the more important book to write than – I, I know people are going to
36 write on Delany as an Afrofuturist and Butler and as an Afrofuturist and
37 Steven Barnes as an Afrofuturist and I'm going to write on them that way
38 too, um, but not at a book [inaudible 28:12]. I thought it was important to
39 help, uh, answer the challenge of, of, uh, the idea that African-American
40 literature was dead – oh, what was – African-American literature – was
41 the name of, of the book? And I'm forgetting, uh, the guy that had it, uh,
42 that, that said it – which is terrible. Name blanking happens. Right?
43
44 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
45

1Isiah Lavender: Uh, but that was also a conscious response to that. No, I don't think so and
2 so I was telling people I also thought about, uh, writing a chapter on *Song*
3 *of Solomon* with Toni Morrison but that would've...
4

5Kimberly Williams: [Mm-hm 28:48].
6

7Isiah Lavender: ...taken a long time because there's so much scholarship to sift through
8 and a lot of thinking to sift through. But *The Myth of the Flying African* is
9 something that needs to be discussed somewhat in terms of Afrofuturism
10 and I thought well someone else can write that story. If my book
11 influences anybody, I would like to...
12

13Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
14

15Isiah Lavender: ...see that. I thought about writing on, uh, *Flight to Canada* as well and
16 Raven Quicksill's Story and *Uncle Robin* in terms of being an
17 Afrofuturism story and, eh, and it is. But then there was an Afrofuturism
18 conference at Yale and I had [throat clearing] got wind of someone writing
19 on *Flight to Canada* and I think I just saw it in *African-American Review*
20 or, or some such journal, um, that actual essay and I'm, aww, they said it
21 pretty well. I don't think I – I'm glad I decided not to write on that story
22 even though I had gone through my process and typed up every quote
23 from that novel and, uh, uh, typed up every quote from, uh, my research
24 on that novel from journals and book chapters and books on Ishmael Reed.
25

26 And like, aww, sometimes you have to let things go. And so at one point, I
27 felt, uh, well in the very recent past, I've said everything I wanna say about
28 Afrofuturism but it seemingly will not let me go. [laughter] Right? And so
29 I am – I'm – but I'm still – I've moved on to my next book project and, and
30 that's, uh, critical race theory and science fiction, um, and so that's what
31 my, my heart is in now. But, uh, I'm always paying attention to
32 Afrofuturism and I guess critical race theory and science fiction could fall
33 underneath that umbrella that, that I think a-, Afrofuturism has created for,
34 uh, the study of race and ethnicity and science fiction, which is, uh, my
35 bread and butter so to speak.
36

37Kimberly Williams: Okay. Yeah. All right. And last question...
38

39Isiah Lavender: Okay.
40

41Kimberly Williams: [30:42] Um, if you could – [you know 30:42], if someone was coming in
42 here like, you know, [tsk] Dr. Lavender, I really, really wanna get into
43 Afrofuturism, could you give me almost like a [tapping] seminal, like
44 mixed tape of, of sort of entryway to kind of like get into, like 3 to 5 all
45 across mediums? It could be artists, film, song...
46

1Isiah Lavender: Okay.
2
3Kimberly Williams: ...text?
4
5Isiah Lavender: A mixed tape of Afrofuturism. One, I would see the film *The Last Angel of History* by John Akomfrah. That's a, uh, certainly an important work.
6
7Two, I would read, uh, uh, [Inaudible 31:21] work, uh, because he is an
8important Afrofuturist scholar, early Afrofuturism scholar. Then I would
9choose any book by Samuel R. Delany, probably, uh, *Dhalgren* or *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, uh, because he's, eh, excellent. Then I
10would also choose Octavia Butler, uh, [tsk] in terms of, uh, her, eh – I
11mean you'd choose her just because she is magnificent and I would go
12with *Parable of the Sower* because it's my favorite Butler novel. Uh, then
13uh, I think I would, uh, bring in the Caribbean-inflected, uh, version of
14Afrofuturism, uh, with Nalo Hopkinson's first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*.
15
16
17
18Kimberly Williams: [Mm-hm 32:08].
19
20Isiah Lavender: And, uh, musically c-, I would go with my favorite hip hop group, uh, uh,
21Outkast. And I know there are lots of different groups but that's, that's
22who I'm partial to.
23
24Kimberly Williams: Great.
25
26Isiah Lavender: And so there, there's so much. Uh, artwork, I honestly I don't know
27enough about, uh, the world of art but, uh, again if I come back to, uh, the
28beginning of this talk, you know Afrofuturism when you see it...
29
30Kimberly Williams: [Hm 32:35].
31
32Isiah Lavender: ...and so you have to have *Black Panther*, uh, the Coogler film. You
33cannot avoid it. And I think I've given you like 8. [laughter] And so
34there's so much.
35
36Kimberly Williams: Is that all?
37
38Isiah Lavender: Where do you stop?
39
40Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 32:46]. [laughter] Thank you so much again for your time and
41for your thorough, um, just really, really enriching responses and
42answers...
43
44Isiah Lavender: Oh, thank you.
45
46Kimberly Williams: ...and really appreciate that.

1
2Isiah Lavender: Oh, it was a lotta fun.
3
4Kimberly Williams: Yes. [Inaudible 33:00].
5
6Isiah Lavender: Harmless, painless. [laughter]
7
8Kimberly Williams: Yes.
9
10
11/lo