

**Charles Phelps Taft Research Center**  
**at the University of Cincinnati**  
**Center Fellowship Grant Application**

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Each section (I-IV) should be placed at the start of a new page. All required materials must be included in a single document, uploaded to the electronic submissions system, no later than 5PM on the published day of the deadline. Intradepartmental review and two external letters of support are required for this program. Applicants should submit their application with enough time to receive all letters of support prior to the close of the deadline. Taft does not accept an obligation to review applications that have not received the required letters of support by the close of the deadline.

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**I. General Information**

- a. Name: **XXXXXXXXXX**
- b. M#: **XXXXXXXX**
- c. Department: **Africana Studies**
- d. Position:
- e. Project title: **Memory and Liberation in Black Women's Speculative Fiction**
- f. Potential external funding that might arise from this project: **Funding for NEH Summer Institute on Black Speculative Feminism**
- g. Intended results of a funded research, e.g., concrete plans for publication or conference presentations: **Book manuscript revisions in preparation for publication with an academic press (Target: The Ohio State University Press, New Suns series)**

## II. Taft Grant History

### 2018-2019

Project: **"Memory and Time Travel: Sankoferration in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*"**

Award: Taft Research Travel Grant: **\$4,000**

Results:

- Conducted archival research of Octavia E. Butler's papers at the Huntington Library
- Contributed to completed book proposal
- Will contribute to monograph "Memory and Time Travel" chapter
- Will present "Memory and Time Travel: Sankoferration in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* and Rasheedah Phillips's *Telescoping Effect: Part One*" at the 2020 National Black Studies Association conference.

Project: **"Memory as Horror and Healing in Tananarive Due's *The Good House*"**

Award: Taft Domestic Travel Grant: **\$1,200**

Results:

- Presented paper at NCBS Annual Conference in March 2019.
- Presentation will contribute to chapter in monograph

### 2019-2020

Project: **"I Am My Sister's Keeper: Black Feminist Social Justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"**

Award: Taft Research Group: **\$3,000**

Results:

- Formation of Black Feminist Social Justice Research Group with Drs. Carolette Norwood, Brandi Blessett, and Tia Gaynor.

### III. Project Proposal

#### *Memory and Liberation in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*

##### Introduction

Over the last twenty years, memory and black women's writing has been a fertile field of literary scholarship. Recently, scholars have begun examining the presence of ghosts and haunting in Africana literature, coinciding with the academic and popular rise of Afrofuturism, a field of scholarly study, artistic output, and activism which attends to the fusion of the past, present, and future in the science fiction and fantasy of black creators. Despite both of these fields' valuable contributions, there remains a gap in the scholarship of the speculative around black women's use of memory in postcolonial or decolonizing contexts. My book project, *Memory and Liberation in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*, addresses this gap. The culmination of five years of research and publication, I am requesting a Taft Research Center Fellowship to aid in the completion of the revisions.

##### About the Book

My book's central argument is that black women employ tropes of speculative fiction to explore memory not just as it relates to trauma, but as a tool for liberatory projects on both individual and systemic levels. Recognizing their racially gendered roles as keepers of cultural and familial memory, authors such as Octavia E. Butler, Nnedi Okorafor, and Tananarive Due propose memory as a mechanism for personal healing, building political and social structures, and decolonization.

*Memory and Liberation* charts the moments in Africana women's speculative fiction where characters harness, or fail to harness, the power of memory, transforming memory from passive recollection to direct or indirect social justice action. Taking a black feminist approach and employing archival research and textual analysis, this manuscript speaks to several important emancipatory themes within Afrofuturism: exploring futurity and the projection of a full range of black humanity into those anticipated spaces, imagining new worlds and novel approaches to old problems, and the decolonization of time in fiction employing non-Western and non-linear expressions of time.

*Memory and Liberation* equally explores the role of memory in expressions of black love and pleasure, while recognizing the importance of the traumatic, and contributes

to a growing body of scholarship that renders visible the cross-pollination between black women's science fiction and fantasy, black feminist theory, and Afrofuturist praxis towards the development of black speculative feminism.

An interdisciplinary project, *Memory and Liberation* draws from a variety of disciplines and theoretical frameworks, including critical race, postcolonial, and black feminist theory, memory and trauma studies, science fiction studies, and the growing field of Afrofuturism. I examine Octavia E. Butler's personal diaries, correspondence, and early drafts of her novels, specifically *Kindred* and the Patternist series. Other novels I examine include Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*, Nalo Hopkinson's *The New Moon's Arms*, Tananarive Due's *The Good House*, Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, and Rasheedah Phillips novella *Telescoping Effect: Part One*. Each of these novels by African American woman explore the role of memory as a means of personal growth and as a tool to address oppression.

### Organization of the Book

- I. Introduction: Towards a Black Speculative Feminism: The introduction draws connections between black women's emotional labor as diplomats, mediators, translators, teachers, and therapists, their racialized and gendered role as the keeper of familial and cultural memory, and the work of imagining, interpreting, and exhorting a method of struggle towards liberation in speculative fiction.
- II. Memory as Horror and Healing: This chapter examines how black women use speculative fiction to define memory as a source of healing. Analyzing Tananarive Due's *The Good House*, Nalo Hopkinson's *The New Moon's Arms*, and Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, I argue that these authors position forgetting one's family or cultural legacy as a source of horror or tension in their stories, while reconnecting with the past represents the resolution of those tensions. This lays the groundwork for the following chapters by examining the emotional labor of remembering and social justice work that runs through each subsequent chapter.
- III. Memory and the Reproduction of Regime: Taking us beyond the individual to the structural, this chapter argues that black women's speculative fiction acts

as a tool for imagining worlds beyond the legacy of colonization. Examining Octavia E. Butler's Patternist series, it focuses on the dangers of recreating oppression when we choose not to remember the past as we build these futures and how black women's speculative fiction reminds readers of the importance of memory in forward-looking agendas.

IV. Re/membering Africa: Decolonization and Alien Invasion: The focus of this chapter is Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*, a novel that imagines an alien invasion acting as a force for decolonization rather than the more frequent version of invasion in which humans unite in battle against a force of destruction. This chapter demonstrates how black women's visionary fiction provides readers with a sense of the depth of change necessary for decolonization and supports the following chapter's suggestion that the decolonization of time is a potential vector of radical change.

V. Memory and Time Travel: This chapter approaches decolonization from the perspective of Western and non-Western notions of time, taking Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* and Rasheedah Phillips's novella *Telescoping Effect: Part One* as its focus. Phillips, as both an author and activist, explores the western colonization of concepts of temporality and, like Butler, how family lineage provides pathways for restoring seemingly lost histories. Drawing together the relationship between memory and an understanding of time as iterative, this chapter explores time and its possibilities for radical social re-organization.

VI. Conclusion: The conclusion draws together each of the chapters and the implications of memory work in black women's speculative fiction, touching on real world applications of this work in the activism of Adrienne Maree Brown, Rasheedah Phillips, and Ingrid LaFleur.

### My Established Record of Research

This project is born out of several years of research and publication. I was awarded the University of South Carolina's ASPIRE grant supporting June 2015 and June 2016 visits to the Octavia E. Butler collection of papers at the Huntington Library. These

resulted in an invitation to participate in the Octavia E. Butler Studies symposium at The Huntington Library in June 2017, presentations at the American Studies Association and National Women's Studies Association 2018 conferences, and an interview with BBC Radio. I concluded this research with the help of a Taft Travel for Research award in June 2019. These experiences and data collection laid the groundwork for the larger project.

The archival research also led to the publication of "Memory and Resistance: Doro's Empire, Mary's Rebellion, and Anyanwu as *Lieu de Mémoire* in Octavia E. Butler's *Mind of My Mind* and *Wild Seed*" in a special double-issue on Butler scholarship in *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. My combined textual analysis of Butler's novels and Butler's own notes allowed me to take an uncommon approach to her work, opening a new area of growing interest in Butler as a postcolonial voice. The monograph continues this ground-breaking research, putting Butler's use of memory in conversation with other black women writing speculative fiction.

#### Contributing to and Benefitting from a Multi-Disciplinary Intellectual Environment

A Center Fellowship would provide me with the time and space to complete the monograph, which serves as a key feature of my tenure dossier in Africana Studies. It also would provide the necessary interdisciplinary environment in which to enrich the various threads of my argument. In turn, my work and perspectives on race, gender, time, and futurity would contribute to the conversations with and projects of other Center Fellows.

#### Project Schedule

Having completed the archival research on the manuscript, travel is no longer necessary, allowing me to focus on revisions in line with Taft requirements that recipients of the award utilize Taft offices as their primary work location.

Furthermore, I have completed the book proposal and two sample chapters of the monograph, currently under peer review for OSU, New Suns series. I anticipate completing the initial draft of the manuscript during AY 2019-2020. Should I be awarded the fellowship, I plan to use the interdisciplinary conversations among Taft Center Fellows and peer review feedback to complete revisions and indexing in order to bring the monograph to press by the end of 2021.

Proposed Taft Year (2020-2021)

Fall: Revise Chapters 1-3

Spring: Revise Chapter 4, Introduction & Conclusion

June: Submit revised manuscript to publisher

Proposed Final Publication Format

The partial manuscript is under review for the Ohio State University Press, *New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative* series edited by Susana M. Morris and Kinitra D. Brooks.





