Race in the galactic age: Sankofa, Afrofuturism, whiteness and Whitley Strieber

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RACE IN THE GALACTIC AGE: SANKOFA, AFROFUTURISM, WHITENESS AND WHITLEY STRIEBER

by

Clifton Zeno Johnson

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Abstract

Octavia Butler once asked if black skin was so disruptive a force that the mere presence of it would alter a story. In the post-colonial era, skin color remains a polarizing topic. While humans are still redefining perceptions about race, people across planet earth are opening up to the possibility of the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life. This paper explores how the acknowledgment of a galactic presence would transform perceptions of whiteness. The experiences of the best-selling author and proclaimed contactee, Whitley Strieber, are used as case studies to analyze if Amero-European ingrained bias toward melanin would influence the western world’s interactions with dark-skinned extraterrestrial species. The white male is portrayed as the prototypical sci-fi nerd in popular American culture; however, the themes and struggles present in science fiction remain deeply connected with those present in African American culture. Despite the acknowledged presence of extraterrestrials in African centered tradition, Stieber's experiences demonstrate that whiteness still holds influence on the dominant cultural position regarding alien contact.

This paper will use the West African practice of Sankofa to trace African centered histories and traditions designed for communicating with entities from different dimensions, realities or even planets that continue to perpetuate in African American culture. I argue that African American culture has been addressing aspects of reality unacknowledged by the western world. I demonstrate that elements of the cosmic, supernatural, extraterrestrial or superhuman continue to manifest in African centered culture. These continually dismissed observations get lost in a world where the European Enlightenment has led to a culture in which whiteness establishes itself as “a norm that represents an authoritative, delimited and hierarchical mode of
thought” as Joe Kinechole notes, limiting Amero-European culture from fully embracing a world view that includes extraterrestrials. Whiteness changes as it interacts in a range of settings and this paper examines the role of whiteness in a galactic environment by exploring how whiteness navigates through alien spaces.
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“We are not the same, I am an alien”
-Lil Wayne, Phone Home

“African Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind.)” (180)
-Mark Devry Black to the Future

Sankofa: Afrofuturism and the Diasporan Connection to Extraterrestrial Life.

I was born in 1984, with my formative years as a young person spent in the 1990s. A resurgence of black consciousness saturated the 1990s, particularly in the form of revolutionary hip-hop music that encouraged African Americans to embrace African cultural practices. Public Enemy, X-Clan, A Tribe Called Quest, MC Lyte, KRS One, Rakim, Queen Latifah, and Big Daddy Kane were some of the most famous artists of their era. Collectively, their music allowed for young black children to see images and hear messages from people who were confident, possessed a knowledge of black history and Africa, and encouraged their listeners to create a higher quality of life for themselves through the awareness of this knowledge shared in the music. I grew up in a home where Malcolm X and Chuck D got equal time on my older cousins’ tape decks. Africa was always something I was taught to reach back and embrace. This reality manifested for me when I turned 29, and I moved to Agogo, a town of about 30,000 people in the Ashanti-Akyem District of Ghana. I spent two years as a volunteer where I served as the Director of a small K-8 school of about 250 students called The Youth Institute of Science and Technology.

For secular reasons, I went to Ghana to get the experience of managing a school and
developing young teachers through professional development. For personal, cultural and spiritual reasons I went to Ghana to finally rebuild my connection with my ancestral home of West Africa. Learning to think and speak like an African and reorienting my perceptions from my American upbringing was a wonderfully transformative experience. While in Ghana, I was able to observe the power of the Akan concept of Sankofa. Sankofa is a West African concept created by the Akan people in what is modern-day Ghana. Sankofa is one of many Adinkra symbols. Adinkras are visual symbols or ideographs that represent ideas and aphorisms of which we can use as guiding principles. In the Akan language of Twi, the full expression is “Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki.” The literal translation is “It is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” The concept derived from the words: San (return), Ko (go), Fa (look, seek and take). Sankofa symbolizes the Akan quest for knowledge with the implication that the search remains based on critical examination and patient investigation. The symbol is stylized as a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward, and its head turned backward. The bird represents the idea that the past serves as a guide for planning the future.

In Ghana, I was reminded by my mentors that there is wisdom in learning from the past. The Sankofa bird facing one way and looking the other represents continuous movement through reflection and investigation of our experience. As this forward march proceeds, the knowledge of the past must never be forgotten. We should reach back and gather the best of what our history has to teach us. This search gives us the opportunity to achieve our full potential as we move forward. No matter what our current condition, anything we have lost, forgotten, forgone, or been stripped of can be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated. Many African Americans are familiar with Sankofa as it is one of the most relevant of all the Adinkra symbols to members of the African Diaspora in the Americas and Caribbean. For displaced
Africans of enslaved ancestors, Sankofa means to reclaim African cultural identity. I was first exposed to the concept in 1991 as a child watching *Yo! MTV Raps*, a musical program that showcased hip-hop videos and performances during the 90s. I was seven years old. The Brooklyn based rapper, MC Lyte, who would always wear jackets and jewelry with African imagery, including Sankofa, made an appearance and I saw the mythical bird painted on her jeans. She had earrings in the shape of Africa and a bust of Nefertiti on her necklace. Her love for her African identity moved me. She and the hip-hop artists of the time inspired many children from my neighborhood to wish to practice Sankofa and begin to reclaim our African identities. However, it was the visual of the Sankofa bird that unlocked something inside of me.

While I was a boy listening to MC Lyte, Mark Dery published *Black to the Future* (1994). In it, he discusses Afrofuturism, which as an aesthetic incorporates science fiction with African diasporic culture. Often in the science fiction genre, symbols are left to serve as homing beacons for members of the same race or group or future generations. They serve as a reminder of ideas or concepts that are larger than us. In Superman, the iconic symbol on his chest happens to be in the shape we recognize as an S, but to a native of Krypton, it is the symbol of Kal-El's family and represents their culture’s value system. Things like the Adinkra symbols of Ghana or the Ankh of Kemet are symbols that resonate with African Americans. They speak to a cultural memory of the homeland of Africa. They are present in African American musical genres like jazz, funk, and rap music. On reflecting of my experience seeing MC Lyte, a confident female emcee from Brooklyn wearing Sankofa, I believe something profound occurred inside of me. My ancestors developed Sankofa as a reminder. Many African concepts on spirituality and philosophy were deliberately cut away from enslaved Africans in the Americas, and many African Americans were forced to assimilate to foreign religions like Christianity or Islam,
forgetting the Adinkra system, and yet here were the Adinkra symbols on cable television on a school night at 10 pm.

While studying Twi and learning Akan protocol and culture, I came across a word that describes what I was attempting to rebuild, that word is Twi is amammere, which translates as “culture.” In his book *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas*, Kwesi Konadu (2010) chronicles how Akan cultural values were powerful and survived by being passed down by Akan diasporans across the Americas and the Caribbean. While discussing Akan culture he notes “to the idea of cultural durability, the Akan proverbially claim “ekyem tete a eka ne mmeramu” (when the shield wears out, its framework remains intact), and here human culture, like the shield, may give way, but its core ideational and spiritual understandings remain.” (17) Konadu would describe my experience watching an African American artist, shining the symbol that would remind an entire generation of African American children to reach back to Africa, as an example of ideational culture. Ideational culture includes “ideas, symbols, values, principles, and ways of feeling, thinking, and acting as well as a stock of knowledge and ways of making sense of reality as constructed or filtered by a group.” (16) The Sankofa symbol was able to transcend the temporal limitations of African culture being hidden or forcefully out of reach of African Americans.

Rap music of the 1990s did not only perpetuate embracing African centered culture but it also perfectly integrated the uniquely African American genre of Afropop. In her analysis of Dery’s *Black to the Future*, Sonia Rao notes that the concept of Afropop “shakes up our preconceived notions of history and race by envisioning an often utopic future shaped by black technological innovation. Elements of it predate the term, going as far back as the 1950s, appearing everywhere from visual art to novels to comic books to music by the likes of George
Clinton and the jazz musician Sun Ra.” (2) As stated, Sankofa symbolizes the Akan quest for knowledge with the implication that the quest remains based on critical examination and patient investigation. Paradoxically, to move forward to our future, we must look back to our past.

Sankofa is a concept that goes outside western perceptions of time and space. Sankofa allows for past, present, and future to simultaneously exist in the same moment, it allows for all of those realities to bleed into one another and posits that communication can occur between perceived time and space barriers. On this Konadu asserts

Often in academic discourse, there exists a subtle yet important disjuncture between knowledge and belief. The idea of belief has undergone significant semantic change in several European languages over the past few centuries and “belief” as it is employed in anthropology does indeed connote error or falsehood,” for “cultural others” possess “belief systems” with attendant “folk scientists,” while Europeans and their ideological progeny have “knowledge systems” of a distinctly scientific and, assured quality. (18)

While critics in the west may not give credence to Akan cultural perceptions, philosophy or “beliefs” on the nature of reality, they do acknowledge the popularity of the Afrofuturism genre of science fiction.

African Americans have a history of embracing Afrofuturism in their art. Jazz, funk, and rap all have a litany of artists who embraced these concepts in their work. It should come to no surprise that sci-fi, Afrofuturism and comic books remain an integral part of hip-hop culture. Black music has a history of embracing aesthetics that include aspects of reality that may be superhuman or cosmic. In his essay, Devry asks “Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for more legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn’t the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers — white to a man — who have engineered our collective fantasies?” (180) Sankofa allows for the
African diaspora to rethink and reimagine our potential futures by bringing us back to our past. This fluidity of beliefs allows for transformation to occur. It was easy for black children in my neighborhood to see the rapper Ghost Face of the Wu-Tang Clan morph into his alter ego as Tony Stark / Iron Man. Diasporans in the west have often had to imagine larger than life versions of themselves to survive the trauma of being black in America. It is not always the hero that becomes enmeshed in the identity of hip-hop artists. Conversely, it was rapper MF Doom who transformed and took on the persona of the villain Dr. Doom in his work. These examples of ideational culture make sense for the displaced African in the Americas, particularly in the hip-hop world.

In *The Subversive Science Fiction of Hip-Hop* (2015) Ruth Eveleth interviews Gabriel Teodros, a Seattle based hip-hop artist and science fiction writer. He gives some perspective on just how powerful this experience can be for African diasporans. In the interview, he lamented that when discussing “Black people here in the US, you’re talking about a music and culture and expression from a people who got kidnapped, from their land, their home planet, and brought to an alien world, and had to create a future where a future seemed impossible.” (2) In American popular culture, the prototype of the sci-fi nerd is often portrayed as a white male, however as Ruth Eveleth suggests “the themes and struggles present in science fiction are deeply connected with those present in black culture.” Elements of the cosmic, supernatural or superhuman manifest in aspects of black culture across the globe.

Hip Hop artist Killah Priest often references communication with beings from other dimensions, other realms or even from outside of our galaxy. In his song *My Life*, he raps “I start spazzin', talking about the mothership / Throwin' off my publicist.” For many African Americans, particularly those who embrace African cultural identity, Priest’s lyrics speak to their
heart. However, as Kanadu suggests, African people are not able to freely converse about these aspects of reality in a white western world because as noted earlier “cultural others” possess “belief systems” with attendant “folk scientists,” while Europeans and their ideological progeny have “knowledge systems.” I have often experienced what Killah Priest is referencing. Since I was a small boy, I have been aware of contact experiences with what appears to be extraterrestrial life. The contact experience comes with a range of emotions from intense joy to the highest levels of fear. It is difficult to explain or articulate. I have never been able to understand why they occur. My family has a history of these experiences. My father, grandfather, and grandmother all talk about strange interactions they have had with extraterrestrial life. In my case, these contacts became even more regular when I moved to Africa. I have memories of these visitations that go back to as early as four years old. It is not easy to discuss these events with people in general. I have found that when I share these experiences with other African Americans or members of the diaspora, the result is empathy and compassion. If I engage in conversation regarding extraterrestrial life or personal experiences outside of my community, particularly in conversation with my white friends and associates, I am often dismissed, met with quizzical stares, or at worst met with aggression.

In The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: A Pedagogical Analysis (1999), Joe Kincheloe sheds light on how white reason, with its roots in the European Enlightenment, has made it difficult for some white people to give credence to the African perspective on things that involve science, history or the unknown. We can easily extend this to the extraterrestrial phenomenon. He notes “the European Enlightenment notion of rationality with its privileged construction of a transcendental white, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power while concurrently giving every indication that he escaped the confines of time and
space.” (1) The influence of the European Enlightenment has led to as what Kincheloe refers to as a “rationalistic white womb” in which whiteness establishes itself as “a norm that represents an authoritative, delimited and hierarchical mode of thought.” When African diasporans like myself or Killah Priest begin to articulate a different experience that includes the presence of extraterrestrials as a potential reality, it causes the cognitive dissonance that Fanon addressed.

Perhaps the experience generates a knee-jerk response because it challenges the authoritative, hierarchical mode of thought that is at the foundation of whiteness and what is considered other. This forces artists like Killah Priest or any African in the diaspora to consider the relationship between cultural other and whiteness. Most of the white adults who engage in dialogue with other groups regarding the extraterrestrial phenomenon have all been to school. On this Kincheloe notes that western values within institutional rearing erased the values, epistemologies, and belief systems that grounded the cultural practices of diverse peoples. Without such cultural grounding [white] students have often been unable to appreciate the manifestations of brilliance displayed by non-white cultural groups. Caught in the white interpretive filter, they were unable to make sense of diverse historical and contemporary cultural productions as anything other than proof of white historical success. The fact that one of the most important themes of the last half of the twentieth century - the revolt of the “irrationals” against white historical domination - has not been presented as a salient part of the white (or non-white) story is revealing, a testimony to the continuing power of whiteness and its concurrent fragility. (3)

Indeed, Killah Priest writes about experiencing extraterrestrial contact in much of his music, but if he authentically shares the intricacies of the experience with his publicist it “throws him off.” In other words, if Priest were to leave these rich experiences he describes in his music as just music, it is business as usual. If he were to engage in a genuine dialogue with his publicist, the conversation would be uncomfortable and most likely not understood.

On his 2007 album The Offering, Priest has a song titled Melodic Pt. 2 featuring another Brooklyn emcee named Heaven Razah. On the song Priest describes an encounter with
extraterrestrials who could traverse dimensions by vibrating at certain frequencies. Over a sample that features a baroque era harp playing over the boom bap of hip hop drums, he raps:

"Stainless glass windows of ancient black Negroe on my casement
My visitors, thug niggas hopping out of spaceships
Like "What up Priest? We just swerved across your spectrum"

Here the rapper’s word choice embodies the elements of Sankofa. He is describing the relationship between the culture of his ancestors who were familiar with the connection of past, present, and future. This kinship, demonstrated by the “thug niggas” visiting him from a spaceship, could either be off-world diasporans from the present/future or ancestors from our past that used technology or psychic projection abilities to tune in to his frequency and location. The word spectrum can be used when applied to a rainbow, and is produced by separation of the components of light by their different degrees of refraction according to wavelength, or it can be used to classify something or suggest that it can be organized, in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme or opposite points. In these lyrics, the idea that the extraterrestrials can travel across spectrums or frequencies implies their ability to traverse time and space in a way that western science has not understood or mastered. They also suggest that the wavelength or spectrum that the extraterrestrials live in is different from the one accustomed to by human beings. However, it does not mean they are incapable of traveling in that fashion.

On the same song, Melodic Pt. 2, Brooklyn emcee Heaven Razah provides us with insight on the importance of how to decode this type of information. The imagery he provides also makes sense through the lens of Sankofa, he raps:

"Handwritings on the project wall
Spray painted in the modern-day Cuneiform on black uniforms
You might meet a crackhead that made it, to translate it"
Heaven Razah’s vivid description is full of the supernatural and Sankofa. He starts by referencing the biblical concept of handwriting on the wall, which of course is an allusion to the Old Testament story about Daniel and Prince Belshazzar and King Nebuchadnezzar. When the Jewish people were still being held captive in Babylon, a mysterious hand, colloquially referred to as the “hand of God” appeared and scribed a message on the wall, ultimately dooming the oppressors and their kingdom. Heaven Razah takes this same imagery and applies it to the oppressive state African Americans have experienced while being held in captivity by western powers, in this case, The United States. He compares the wisdom written on Belshazzar’s wall, scribed by the “hand of God,” to the wisdom written by graffiti artists or drug addicts on the walls of the modern-day U.S. inner city.

Instead of hieroglyphs or ancient Amharic, the content is now being presented in modern day cuneiform via the distinctly African American tradition of spray painting or “bombing” by those who live in the slums. When modern European explorers began to raid the pillage the most sacred chambers of the pyramids in Kemet, they were perplexed by the strange, indecipherable hieroglyphs on the wall. They were unable to understand any of the communications on the wall, written by ancient Africans until they deciphered the Rosetta Stone to help them translate what they were seeing. Heaven Razah is positing that today’s Rosetta Stone needed for the deciphering of ancient knowledge in the present can come from sources deemed as incredible, unfactual or not reliable by white America.

In Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is a figure who can appear to his followers in many forms. He can take the form of a beggar, graffiti artist, drug addict, leper or even an angelic
being. Christians are encouraged to treat all whom they come into contact with love, respect, and compassion because they never know if the person they are encountering is the Christed one.

Heaven Razah is making a point that an ancient wisdom, regarding our future, is being presented to us by those displaced Africans in the Americas. The modern-day Rosetta stone is that drug addict, graffiti artist or gang member who scribes to provide us with the handwriting on the project wall, delivering a message about the human condition. As Heaven Razah notes, African diasporan culture has learned to communicate in different forms as a means of survival; hence the reference to using hand signals or graffiti tags to tell a story, make a point or deliver a message. To decipher the meaning and ultimately appreciate the content, we need to listen to those who are still in tune with providing specific signals regarding our past, present, and future.

For Heaven Razah, without the ghetto password, or the translation of African diasporans, it will be difficult for any western culture to gain access to the information unless they choose to view the world through new eyes. His verse reminds people to open their mind and heart, encouraging them to let go of some of their preconceived notions of how knowledge is derived.

Ancient Amharic is a Semitic form of communication that originates from an even older language known as Ge’ez. Ge’ez is a language that comes from Ethiopia, and it was one of the original languages used to scribe the Bible. Today, it is a dying language. In Ge’ez there is a fascinating uniquely African word, that word is mankorakur. Mankorakur has a meaning that gives credence to the narrative of Africa and its connection to extraterrestrial life. According to Teodros, who is of Ethiopian descent, “In the Ge’ez version of Genesis, the angels come down to Earth in a mankorakur. Mankorakur is a word that there was no translation for in other languages, it means spaceship. So we had a word for spaceship. So there are elements of sci-fi in our storytelling as far back as you go.” While Ethiopia is in East Africa and Sankofa comes from
West Africa, there is evidence that Africa has a long history of reaching back to the past to move into its future. It seems understandable that African diasporans like Killah Priest or Heaven Razah would be able to tap into these resources of knowledge in the present to describe their encounters with extraterrestrial life.

Killah Priest is one of many artists in the African diaspora to address the connection to extraterrestrials. Funk artist George Clinton has been discussing the mothership connection to African American culture for over 50 years with his band Parliament Funkadelic. Amelia Mason (2014) addresses the cosmic relationship in black music and art noting “Funk is not just a type of music. It’s a state of being, and a technicolor, utopian universe unto itself. It’s home of extraterrestrial brothers” just like the radio DJ explains on Parliament’s 1975 funk album *Mothership Connection*. Black artist such as Janelle Monae, Outkast, 8ball & MJG, Sun Ra, Stevie Wonder, and Missy Elliot have all developed music that incorporates these ideas of an African awareness of the past and a future that involves advanced African technology, including the presence of extraterrestrial beings. Monae’s albums *Metropolis* and *The Electric Lady* both involve Sankofa-esque dystopian themes which include androids with knowledge of the past coming back from the future who battle oppressive clones in the present.

Outkast’s 1996 album *ATLiens* posited African Americans as extraterrestrials who were on earth and destined to meet their galactic family. The acknowledgment of the similarities between African diasporan and extraterrestrial culture is not uncommon. Teodros notes, “The question of who is an alien, who is different, is one that comes up all of the time in science fiction and hip-hop. Because yeah, we’re seen as not human in this society by people who act inhuman. You feel like an alien.” In a 2010 *Billboard* interview, rapper Andre3000, one half of the duo Outkast, described their relationship to life outside of earth, noting “We knew somebody
had to be out here in the universe other than just us. So when I talked about IFOs ‘landing in
Decatur,’ I knew some folks had already seen that shit: identified flying objects.” As an emcee,
Andre3000 has garnered a reputation for his articulate ability to deliver messages through rap
music. It is interesting that he does not use the acronym ‘UFO’ to reference what he and others
were seeing in the skies of Decatur, Georgia. The notion of the UFO is an unidentified flying
object, an object that one has no reference for, something that is unfamiliar. He uses the term
identified flying objects, because he, like many members of the African diaspora, are
comfortable with the notion of life outside of earth. It is not a new concept to their collective
African culture, as he mentions that he knows others in his community who have also had this
experience.

In the beginning of their video for ATLiens, the narrator's voice plays over a montage of
hieroglyphs depicting black people inside of a pyramid from Kemet. “The hieroglyphics tell us a
story of two visionaries, Outkast, not of this world. They led a band of ragtag followers, giving
everything they had, pursued by forces of evil. The symbols show they reached their destiny,
what happened inside is a mystery.” In the video for their song Elevators, they present
themselves as two guides leading a group of Africans to their homeland where both
extraterrestrials, interstellar spaceships, and pyramids await them. At the end of the video, their
eyes begin to change, glowing green while the screen fades to black, symbolizing that they
evolved into the extraterrestrials themselves.

Outkast is well known for their Afrofuturistic motifs in their videos and songs. However,
a rap group like 8ball & MJG are better known for their gangster rap tales which highlight life on
the streets of Memphis, Tennessee. Unlike Afrocentric artists Outkast, Janelle Monae or Killah
Priest, 8ball & MJG are a much different genre of rap music. Their content is more akin to
gangster rap, mostly regarding street tales about crime life, the dangers of drugs, prostitution in poor neighborhoods and cisgendered western masculine norms. Their 2000 album *Space Age 4eva* involved them incorporating alien technology from the future to transform themselves, demonstrating that even groups who have not made a lane for themselves within the Afrofuturistic or African centered genre of rap music, still have a desire to express those aesthetics regardless of how they are perceived.

The lost city of Atlantis, usually depicted in the collective psyche as an ancient civilization on earth that was destroyed and engulfed underwater, is often written about as a land of advanced technology and spirituality. Atlanta, Georgia is often depicted as a new black Mecca where African Americans have managed to thrive and generate success for themselves through various industries despite oppressively racist social systems. Atlanta rapper Michael Render, better recognized by his stage name Killer Mike, is mostly known for his politically themed rap that encourages diasporans to take political control of their future. Often this is accomplished by sharing knowledge about black history, making themselves aware of their African roots and identity. In his 2013 collaboration with Brooklyn emcee and producer El-P (Half of their group Run The Jewels) entitled *Never Come Down*, Killer Mike depicts an experience he has in a gentleman’s club that involves both ancient Africa and the notion that past, present, and future are intertwined. Over the rapid-fire snare and 808 drum patterns he raps:

*Psilocybin, got me slidin, slipping into another dimension*

*Me and this woman made love in Kemet*

*Traveled to the moon came back when we were finished*

*Fell to the earth, lost each other, died and we came back sister and brother*

*In that lifetime we couldn't have each other*

*So we killed ourselves and it killed our mother*

*True romance, in one lap dance*
I was in my future, my present and past

Killer Mike’s verse is about his involvement with psychoactive mushrooms, which ultimately lead him to an out of body experience where he and a woman become cognizant of their consciousness in the past, present and future. He cleverly integrates the Kemetan story of Ausar, his wife Auset and their offspring Heru. Ausar, Auset, and Heru in the west are Osiris, Isis and Horus. These most widely known names are the European titles given to these African deities via the Greek language. In their story, Ausar is killed and separated from his wife, resurrected back to life, produces a child via immaculate conception and eventually comes back to reign as king. Again, this concept of multiple lives on earth or transmuting energy or consciousness through time and space is not uncommon to Africans so it makes sense that it would manifest itself in the music and art of members of their diaspora. Killer Mike chooses to Sankofa the past and reference going back to an awareness of Kemet, one of the largest and most successful African civilizations to ever exist.

Killer Mike, Heaven Razah and Killah Priest have all produced music that incorporates Afrofuturistic motifs coupled with an awareness of an extraterrestrial presence. In African tradition, music has a long history of serving as a tool to reflect the experiences and perceptions of the people. Even if these struggles are traumatic or hostile, African people have used their music to conceptualize their history and experience, reflective of the practice of Sankofa. In an interview included in the documentary Konkombe (2000), the legendary Nigerian Afrobeat artist Fela Kuti gave us insight on the white privilege inherent in western music when he said

Yes if you are in England, the music can be an instrument of enjoyment. You can sing about love, you can sing about whom you’re going to bed with next! But in my own environment, my society is under developing because of an alien system on our people so there’s no musical enjoyment there’s nothing like love, there’s something like a struggle for people’s existence. So as an artist, politically artistically, the whole idea of your environment must be represented in the music, in the arts.
Ironically, in this quote, Fela posits the Amero-European colonisers as the alien presence, but the point he is making is that African centered music is going to represent the experiences of the people.

Mason asserts that hip-hop artists, like “Sci-fi authors have long used the genre to grapple with social problems, propose better futures, or to imagine society’s destructive potential in dystopian worlds. Afrosfuturism uses the genre to riff on experiences of the African Diaspora. Black artists address contemporary racism by imagining funkier, more colorful (in every sense), sci-fi futures.” She goes on to note that “the genre also features clashes with aliens, which serve as allegories for racism. Afrosfuturism seems especially visible right now - and relevant as we muddle through the not-so-utopian realities of our so-called “post-racial” era.” The presence of extraterrestrial life, communication with beings from the outer reaches of the cosmos, traveling to different dimensions or using technology to bend time all seem like ideas or that are perhaps in the future for humanity. In the west, those aesthetics are not relevant to African history, present or future even though African Americans have continually felt a need to address this reality in jazz, funk and hip-hop music.

During an interview with Sonia Rao, Rapper and activist B Dolan makes the argument that African, Native and Indigenous cultures are essential to the world of science fiction. He passionately articulates the following:

Without our stories, without the true nature and reality of who we are as people of color, nothing about fanboy and fangirl culture makes sense. What I mean by that is, if it wasn't for race, X-Men doesn't make sense; if it wasn't for the history of breeding human beings through chattel slavery, Dune doesn't make sense, if it wasn't for the history of colonialism and imperialism, Star Wars doesn't make sense if it wasn't for the extermination of so many indigenous nations, most of what we call the “first contact” stories don't make sense. Without us as the secret sauce, none of this works, and it's about time that we understand that we are the Force that holds the Star Wars universe together.
We’re the Prime Directive that makes Star Trek possible. We are in the Green Lantern Corps. We are the Oath. We are all of those things. Erased, and yet without us? We’re essential. (3)

His words emphasize the points made by Kincheloe regarding how the white womb of rationalism hypocritically removes color from a galaxy full of diversity. His argument is not one of anti-white sentiment, but preferably one that highlights the need for the knowledge that comes from non-white groups. The principle of Yin and Yang is that all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites, for example, female-male, dark-light and old-young. White culture has a long international history of forcibly creating racial and cultural separation with nonwhites. Dolan is arguing that our reality cannot live without people of color. He is making a case that like the contradictory opposite, their existence is essential. Rao notes that “Hip Hop uses science fiction in the same way we all do: to imagine future possibilities and to examine present realities. And in hip-hop, we can see the standard science fiction themes; dystopia, transformation, the struggle for control, the questions of identity and who is an alien and who isn't.” African Americans created hip-hop as an expression to channel energies. In the 1990s hip-hop was the barrier between the Yin and Yang that provided balance in an unbalanced reality for African Americans. People in unfortunate or difficult situations used hip-hop as a way of developing their skills, finding peace, unity and artistic expression.

When we analyze this history of African diasporans in the Americas, we see a people who have been violently oppressed, viciously treated, stripped of their languages, spirituality, humanity, and connection to their home. In The Monophobic Response (1995), Octavia Butler sheds light on the strong relationship between the world of cosmic life and the very extraterrestrial experiences that terrestrial others have had on earth. She describes

The human alien from another country, culture, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class … This is the tangible alien who we can hurt or kill. This is the one we can blame for all
manner of wickedness. This is the one we can feel superior to, the one we can feel certain isn't quite as human as we are. This is “they,” “them,” “those people!” (2)

Africans in the Americas have a long history of being othered or alienated in the Americas. While there is a long history of black culture and an extraterrestrial presence, the deeply rooted ties to galactic life by strange experiences seem to have been reinforced by the alien treatment diasporans have received in the Americas. They are treated as aliens and relegated to a lower place in the social hierarchy. It would make sense for the extraterrestrial phenomenon to manifest and be a topic of discussion and influence. Hip-hop is integrated into African diasporan culture. Africans have a history of using art to tell stories that explain their world. Perhaps the ideational cultural knowledge possessed by African Americans is essential to our growth as homo sapiens evolving into a galactic reality. Maybe the western world would benefit from giving more credence to the perspective of African American culture regarding the extraterrestrial phenomenon.
“It is not really a “Negro revolution” that is upsetting the country. What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody’s history, you must lie about it all. If you have to lie about my real role here, if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad.” (2)

-James Baldwin, *A Talk to Teachers*

**Whitley Strieber: A Case Study-Part 1**

Joe Kincheloe (1990) discusses whiteness as a social construct, noting

As with any racial category, whiteness is a social construction that can be invented, lived, analyzed, modified, and discarded. While western reason is a crucial dynamic associated with whiteness over the last three centuries, there are many other social forces that sometimes work to construct its meaning. Whiteness, thus, is not an unchanging, fixed, biological category impervious to its cultural, economic, political, and psychological context. There are many ways to be white, as whiteness interacts with class, gender, and a range of other race-related culture dynamics. (3)

Many people would agree with Kincheloe, that there are many ways to be white. Kincheloe explains that whiteness changes as it interacts in a range of settings. This essay will examine the role of whiteness in a galactic environment and explore how whiteness navigates through new alien spaces.

In the opening to *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, Alfred J. Lopez (2005) opens his introductory chapter by quoting Howard Winant. Winant makes the compelling observation that “the past half-century or so has been the first time since the dawn of modernity, since the rise of capitalism and the knitting together of the globe in one unified “system” that white supremacy has been called seriously into question on a world-historical scale.” (1). Lopez uses Winant’s observation to demonstrate that we are living in an ever-
changing age, where definitions and identities continue to shift. He takes the argument further noting how Winant ends up admonishing that “even this globalized challenge, could not dislodge, but only somewhat weaken, that ferocious tradition of white supremacist world rule.”(2). It seems that we have not had any terrestrial events, revolutions or realizations that have shifted the dominance of white supremacist tradition on planet earth. Could an interaction with extraterrestrials catalyze a change in the role of whiteness after the age of empire?

In his essay *Vampiric Decolonization: Fanon. “Terrorism.” And Murdrooroo’s Vampire Trilogy* (2005), Gerry Turcotte gives an in-depth analysis of the role of Gothic culture and whiteness in the formation to white Australian identity. While addressing the historical context of the Gothic genre, he notes “From the beginning, Gothic texts have used “alien” spaces to mark or chart alienation, and to test their protagonists’ attitude, principles, and fears. Where the alien space may once have been, to the English, say, Paris or Transylvania, the New World soon became the ultimate signifier of extreme deprivation.” (103) As human beings enter a galactic age, it seems the new alien space is made up of actual alien spaces.

Amero-European western white culture is still using exotic areas to test their attitudes, principles, and fears. Is the white western world concerned with the presence of extraterrestrials, and if so, how would an ingrained bias towards dark skin influence the white world’s interactions with ets? Would white supremacy extend its condescending hand even into exopolitics? While that information and data remain unknown to everyday citizens of planet earth, we do possess enough in the meantime that gives us an idea of how some of white society would respond to the realization of an extraterrestrial presence on planet earth.

In the 1980s when the UFO phenomenon was being more openly recognized and processed within Amero-European culture at a more rapid speed, channeling and
telepathic/psychic material became more well known. These channelers/authors say they are people who go into a deep meditative state and connect with nonlocal consciousness or beings from other planets and dimensions. Other people were experiencing physical and telepathic contact from extraterrestrials and writing about these experiences. During the 1980s and 1990s, the amount of UFO sightings and reports of other contact began to increase all over the world. This trend has only continued into the present moment. From the 1980s to the present, channelers such as Carla Rueckert, Jane Roberts, Patricia Cori, Lyssa Royal, and Daryl Ankha all began to release material and share information that they claimed to be from sources that did not originate on planet earth.

There were a few so-called “new age” authors who gained notoriety by remembering what many other indigenous cultures have never forgotten, who went on and shared practices and information that would challenge western science’s perceptions on extraterrestrial contact. One of those individuals is the author and contactee, Whitley Strieber, who wrote the New York Times’ best sellers Communion in 1987 and Transformation in 1988. Strieber’s case is one of the most widely known and well documented extraterrestrial contact experiences in the United States. Strieber has been writing books on his ET experiences since the 1980s with his writings published in countries all over the world.

He writes about experiences that he has with beings from other planets. His contacts often involve people who come from races that are much older than our human race. These beings often display access to technology that is beyond our comprehension. They also exhibit abilities that humans do not, including telepathy, invisibility and the ability to control matter. Much of Strieber’s material revolves around ideas of connectivity and submission to human evolution. Based on his writings, his contact experiences have demonstrated that we as a species
have to be more willing to connect and embrace the life that is on our world. They have also shown that we have to submit to the greatness that is within ourselves, which requires high levels of discipline and integrity. A large part of that recognition includes rethinking how our current systems of economy, trade or agriculture destroy our natural environment.

In Strieber's 2001 book *The Key*, he writes about an experience with a man who claims to be from another timeline. This individual shared information about man’s inability to work together. According to him, things like vanity, racism, and disregard for the planet would result in devastating circumstances. These warnings are common throughout Strieber’s work. His writing includes contacts with a variety of alien life. Most times they are anthropomorphic, of different heights and colors.

Other times their presence seems more ephemeral in its physical nature. He believes that the extraterrestrial beings he interacts with have shared messages of concern for humanity and planet earth. According to his experiences, one of the reasons for their alien species contacting earth is for the evolutionary advancement of both species. He describes their appearance to the best of his ability and often with vivid detail. The physical description of the beings is always of interest to the human reader. We are wildly curious about how entities from other worlds would look.

Strieber’s experience provides us with an excellent case study into the mind of the western white male. People have studied the behavior of western civilization towards indigenous populations since the two began interacting. How a western man responds to beings of extraterrestrial origin is a new field of study. Could it be possible that western man’s arrogance and beliefs of racial superiority could influence how he sees other individuals that are perceived to be non-white even on a cosmic scale? Could skin color play into western man’s perception of
the universe in the galactic community?

Turcotte chronicles the history of how the Gothic aesthetic helped to lay a foundation for a local Australian voice. Gothic literature refers to a style of writing that is characterized by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom, as well as themes of romance, nature, individuality, and very high emotion. These emotions can include fear and suspense. Of this Turcotte asserts “If it is true that the Gothic was deemed useful for helping to establish a local Australian voice, it also functioned as a silencing discourse for some, in particular, Aboriginal people.” Strieber’s book *Transformation* has many elements of the Gothic genre enmeshed in its narrative. Australia was a colony made up of British criminals who were essentially sent off to a foreign world to help lay a foundation for the construction of a larger colony for the British Empire. As we will see later, Strieber has an affinity for the concept of “empire” and attributes much of this to the accomplishments of the British.

Strieber also has a revealing interaction with what he perceives to be extraterrestrial beings, who like the Aboriginal people of Australia mentioned in Turcotte’s essay have melanated skin. In analyzing Strieber’s alien contact experience, we will be able to see that perhaps he was enacting a similar vision passed down by his ancestors and peers. The state created paraphernalia published in the past by nations like the US and Britain depicts native peoples as monsters in their illustrations.

Imperialistic countries such as Britain and The United States viewed indigenous peoples as “monstrous” as Turcotte describes, and in turn, often mistreated them. In his analyzation of how British white culture viewed the newly founded Australia, Turcotte notes that within the alien space, the white colonizers created identities of the natives in which “the aboriginal peoples were themselves constructed as the monstrous figures haunting the Australian landscape,
specters more frightening than any European demon." He explains that the fear of them was so great "because they represented a physical threat to settlers and to theories of enlightenment that expressed a faith in the indomitable civilizing influence of whiteness.” (105) It could be possible that a new alien landscape has evolved in the psyche of Amero-European culture. Strieber's books demonstrate that the scene has transformed from Paris to Transylvania, to the outback of Australia and now is in the hull of an extraterrestrial spacecraft. An extraterrestrial presence may also represent a physical threat to the same theories of enlightenment and white influence.

Would the modern western world treat extraterrestrial aliens the same way they treat terrestrial aliens from their planet? Would an intergalactic alien be relegated to the status of “monstrous figure” or simply “other” or be “sanctified” as more advanced? As Alfred J. Lopez (2005) asked, “What happens to whiteness after it loses its colonial privileges?” and in this sense what happens to whiteness in a galactic environment? Lopez also asks “To what extent do white cultural norms or imperatives remain embedded in the postcolonial or post-independence state as a part of colonial legacy?” Will the results remain the same in a galactic sense? We can gain insight on these queries by analyzing the contact experience described by Whitley Strieber.

On April 1, 1986, Whitley Strieber described an encounter on a vessel drifting in orbit above the earth, with two extraterrestrial species. This encounter is both full of insight and terror. It will encourage us to analyze if white supremacy has been programmed to reach into the cosmos. According to Strieber, this interaction was a real, physically solid experience. He did not feel that he was in a dream state or receiving communication from something non-physical, nor did he believe that this was a mental projection. He makes this clear noting “I want to stress, to make it absolutely clear, that I did not “wake up” into some sort of dream. I woke up into an absolutely vivid, living and physical moment, in a world as real as this.” (25) For him, this
experience was authentic and literal. His memory of the encounter is full of detailed information regarding his interaction with ET species.

Nevertheless, I stumbled as I came to consciousness because one does not expect to wake up out of a dead sleep in mid-stride. I found myself being led along by two dark blue beings (emphasis my own) about three and a half to four feet tall. Each of them held one of my forefingers in his cool hand. They were noticeably strong, rather round or pudgy looking, and wearing dark blue coveralls that seemed to have lots of flaps and pockets on them. I was not dressed in the pajamas I had gone to sleep in, but rather in a flowing garment, of what was obviously soft white paper. It stood out from my body as though it carried heavy charge of static electricity. (26)

Over his forty plus years of extraterrestrial contact, Strieber has gotten used having these experiences, however, it still must be a very disorientating experience to go from being in your bed on the earth, to walking in full stride on a craft in space, and yet this does not seem out of place to him. However, the aspect of his experience that he finds most out of this world or strikingly different from his ordinary reality is the skin color of his intergalactic wards.

In The Times of Whiteness: Or, Race Between The Postmodern and Postcolonial, Ryan S. Trimm notes that “Attempts to shore up identity or forge relationships find that it is race that mediates and defers, yet temporally stumbles itself. The relay of whiteness means that identity always arrives too late, for this sense of self depends on the deferral of the self/other dialectic.” (231) Strieber immediately points out that the beings who are leading him, the beings who are in control of his fate for the moment, are of a very dark blue hue. The logistics of his current situation deserve consideration. Planet earth is a place where technology rules. One of the reasons why western civilization has been able to dominate other countries is because of their access to cutting-edge technology that becomes weaponized. Strieber comes from a culture where civilizations are judged by their contributions, especially in the field of science and technology, but also very much so by their military might. A question often posed by the
champions of western civilization to demonstrate why they are the dominant culture on planet earth is “Who has provided most of the world’s technology?” If he was on a spaceship with beings leading him down a corridor, these beings are much more technologically advanced than the culture that Strieber originates.

Their possession of a vehicle that can travel at interstellar speeds while maintaining a controlled living environment is proof of this. While this piece of information is essential, it is not that startling to Strieber, as according to him, has had many interactions with extraterrestrials and is familiar with their technologies and vehicles. Instead, it was their dark skin that was at the forefront of his mind. He perceives the beings to have dark skin and be physically dominant. Was that observation based on how firm of a grip they had on his arm? Alternatively, perhaps they performed some feat of physical strength during their commute, or did their exceptionally dark, melanated skin trigger Whitley’s unconscious bias regarding black skin and physical strength, causing him to identify them as being physically superior? We are not given enough evidence and can only speculate. What we do know, is that the most mentally jarring experience of this interaction is that the beings who are leading him are dark skinned. The next part of his contact reveals more about his bias towards dark skin.

My condition at this point, did not seem to approximate a dream at all. I was simply there in the real world and the real world was the curving corridor and the two dark blue beings that were leading me along. They were really very, very blue. The color was doubly startling, because it was a living hue. As rich with subtle complexity as the color of any flesh. I blurted out the first thought that popped into my head: “You’re blue.” One of them looked back over his shoulder when I spoke. He had a broad flat face that almost seemed to grimace at me, so wide was the mouth. He fluttered the heavy lids on his deep shiny eyes and said “We used to be like your blacks, but we decided this was better.” (26)

Here Streiber is faced with information that caused a conscious block in his mind. Sara Tretcher and Mary Bucholtz (2001) note that “whiteness is contextually visible and audible only when it
becomes contextually marked or when it marks a racial Other.” (10) Perhaps in his everyday reality, whiteness is not something that Strieber must often consider. Warren uses Ruth Frankenberg who posited that whiteness is “rather … self evident” to illustrate that “most white people don't even (nor need to) think about the face of their whiteness within this culture.” (186) Strieber was made aware of his whiteness by the dark hue of his visitors. Trimm observes that white racial identity “depends on a perpetual deferral, a relay of appeals to others in an effort to ground a sense of self.” (231) Strieber realizes that he has a bias against the extraterrestrial beings because of their skin color. In his material, Streiber mentions how he has fought against racism all of his life, even going as far as marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington, DC. When faced with the deep rich hue of another being’s melanin, his unconscious bias got the best of him.

In the African American community, people often joke about others being “blue black” to describe someone who had heavily melanated skin. To African Americans, this skin tone is often associated with native Africans on the continent. The concept of being blue black has been around for a long time in African American culture. Streiber’s beings were once the same color as melanated people of earth. To be specific, the extraterrestrial referred to the “blacks” of planet earth to provide a racial framework that Streiber would be able to identify. One wonders if part of Streiber's unconscious (or conscious) bias towards skin was triggered by white supremacy’s definition. White supremacy defines itself as “The belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the black race, and should therefore dominate society.” In White (1997), Richard Dyer observes that “Looking with such passion and single-mindedness at nondominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile,
the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human.” (44) The existence of an ET with darker skin who is more advanced and evolved than Streiber seemed to cause psychological trauma to him. It annihilated his ego and forced him to come to terms with his own bias against non-whites. Perhaps it was inconceivable to Strieber that blackness could have evolved, could have kept going, and could have forged a lane for itself outside of the confines of the white-dominated earth given the racial inequality he knows the earth to have.

He had to wrestle with his innate racial bias, the voice in his mind, telling him the alien's dark skin relegated him to a position below a white person, was juxtaposed with the off-world entity with dark skin being the one in control. At that moment, his disbelief had reduced him to only being able to utter two words, “You’re blue!” This poignant response illustrates the gravity of confusion Strieber was navigating through as his mind tried to comprehend how these black people could be from an advanced species? This racial juxtaposition went against everything that Strieber had ever seen reinforced through white supremacy on planet earth.

In White Talk, Melissa Steyn analyzes diasporic whiteness in South African speech. She opens her essay with a critical analysis of the decentering of whiteness in South Africa. She observes that in South Africa “Whites have lost political power. They largely maintain economic power, and because Western cultures are held in esteem as the believed key to internationalism, they still hold cultural power. The decentering of white power is therefore unequal in terms of social capital their position is certainly not one of marginalization.” (122) In an instant Streiber had lost all cultural or political power by interacting with the blue/black aliens.

Strieber is going through a transformation that is similar to the whites in South Africa. Unlike the white South Africans, Streiber felt marginalized for the first time; he has never had to wrestle with not being the one “in power.” As a Euro-American white man, Stieber is
experiencing a culture shock. One could easily make an argument that in the last 100 years, American white culture has lost its moral standing in the eyes of the world. White culture is still dominant and in power because western civilization has gone to great lengths, enforcing others to hold it in high esteem. For him, the being could not be blue. We begin to see more and more of Strieber’s white bias. He gives us a description of the being’s face and reveals feelings that provide insight into the fear of black skin by white people.

That face was as sinister as anything I had ever seen, and yet the feeling of twinkling good humor was so strong that I almost wanted to laugh. I felt ridiculous. I never thought as myself as a racist but that comment brought into sharp focus my own unacknowledged attitudes about the differences between white and black people. I had marched in the civil rights movement and have not from my earliest days been able to bear racism. (26)

Strieber's deep and yet unacknowledged feelings about racial bias are telling. Although his descriptions seem to contradict one another, the reader gets the sense that his different reactions reflect how layered his response is. When discussing Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, Lopez describes it as a text that “focuses on the ways in which white cultural discourses reduce representations of blackness to the level of function, as trope employed in the construction of white identity.” (3) Strieber is an intelligent man. He is thinking critically about what is going on here. In this contact, Strieber is unable to use his whiteness as a tool to form an identity for himself. As a result of not being able to reduce the blackness of his cosmic ward to a trope that he can conceptualize, fear becomes his vantage point.

At first, his initial description of the face is as sinister. It is also evident to Strieber that this alien being is not malicious nor does he mean him harm. His own words indicate that the extraterrestrial's facial expression was not threatening. His white bias will not allow him to let his better judgment accept this earnest good-humored face. Instead, the sinister nature of blackness was cast upon an individual who does not identify as being human. Within western
society, white people are taught to fear black faces. At its worst, white society consciously associates black faces and by default black society with crime, violence and as something to worry. At its least, white society unconsciously exhibits racial bias based on skin color. Studies done in both the United States and in Europe find that white people who do not identify as prejudiced against black people have unconscious biases and project prejudice to black people even if they find racism abhorrent.

In a study with data collected from 2002 to 2015, using what is known as the IAT or the implicit association test, researchers from Harvard and Sheffield Universities have demonstrated how easily white Americans and white Europeans associate black faces with negativity. On a computer screen, participants saw images of the faces of black people, and they were asked to quickly click on what they saw and label each picture as good or bad.

According to professor Tom Stafford of Sheffield University in England, who administered the test, the results indicated that “No country had an average score below zero, which would reflect positive associations with blackness. In fact, none had an average score that was even close to zero, which would reflect neither positive nor negative racial associations.” In other words, even in the most non-racist communities across Europe, white people do not neutrally perceive black people. Their very image causes feelings of discomfort or contempt. Further, Stafford found “that across Europe racial attitudes are not neutral. Blackness has negative associations for white Europeans.” This date demonstrates that black skin has a negative association in the westernized European mind.

The same article discusses how data from the United States was similar to the European results. Kaiyuan Xu is a data analyst at Project Implicit and helped to take the scores of 1.51 million Americans to find that white Americans, like white Europeans, hold biases towards black
people. Xu found that white American “people are faster at categorizing negative words when they are paired with African American faces, or faster at sorting positive words when they're paired with white faces -- suggesting an uncontrolled mental association between negative things or concepts and African Americans.” We can only imagine the psychological trauma that Whitley Strieber faced during this experience.

The presence of these dark-skinned extraterrestrials who used to be like the “blacks” of earth, who possessed vastly superior technology and mental capacity, were now in control of his fate. Peter Mclaren (1998) notes “It’s not that whiteness signifies preferential to one pole of the white-nonwhite binarism. Rather, whiteness seduces the subject to accept the idea of polarity as the limit-text of identity, as the constitutive foundation of subjectivity.” (68) This extraterrestrial being was not going to be seduced or influenced by Strieber’s customary white privilege that allows others to determine their identity through the gaze of nonwhiteness.

For the first time, Strieber’s mind had to code switch into a binary relationship with black skin that he could not fathom. In that sense, Strieber had become raced and was no longer the power majority that he was accustomed to being. Dyer notes that “The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that - they can only speak for their race.” (2) This most extraordinary circumstance which constitutes a potential worst-case scenario for the western mind demonstrates the vast prison that white supremacy has put around white society. Strieber was locked behind the bars of his own bias against dark skin.

At the very least, the reader can see that Strieber was not proud of this realization. Strieber learned something new about himself, that he had an unconscious bias towards dark skin. Once he acknowledged this aspect of himself, he could then attempt to heal that part of himself, or at the very least critically think about why he would have such a bias.
It would benefit some white citizens of earth to follow the example of Whitley Strieber and begin to get to the roots of their fear of black skin. Black skin has historically been presented as something to fear in Amero-European culture. James Baldwin points out that if we have to lie about any part of our history, then we will have to lie about all of it. Strieber began to feel very uncomfortable after this realization. He began to process some of the lies he had been told and some of the lies he internalized. He remembers

Here I was in the presence of a statement so innocent and so powerful that even I stumbled along. It shocked me with all of its guileless force at that moment the reality of my unconscious racism surfaced. I felt it as acute embarrassment. In my secret mind, even the two beings leading me along were less than me. (27)

The statement that Strieber felt was so small, yet so powerful was his “You’re blue” comment he made to the visitors. In those two words, much more was being said than just a simple observation of their appearance.

He realized that those beings who were more advanced in every way he could ever imagine were still less than he because of their dark skin color. These types of feelings are holding planet earth back in our evolution as a species. It has held us back for some time now. White supremacy and ideas of that fashion have to be left behind. Just as humans refused to let the powers of the time mandate to them that the solar system was geocentric, humans can no longer afford to perpetuate white supremacy in the wake of evolving into an intergalactic species.

In western culture, the notion of alienation usually has two meanings. Merriam-Webster defines it as either the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or as loss or lack of sympathy. Indeed western culture has spent centuries creating a separation between itself and the indigenous world. The binary of white and nonwhite will no longer be efficient in a galactic age. The binary demonstrates how white society has gone
to great lengths to distance itself from the rest of the world. It implies that white people are not indigenous to the germane cultures of planet earth, that they are somehow separate from the rest of the collective. At the same time, Amero-Euro western culture has exhibited an extreme lack of sympathy and empathy for the countless numbers of lives lost or ruined due to its brutality.

It would be an act of irony that western society’s alienation would serve as our collective impediment in interacting with other alien nations. For white people to have perpetrated the crimes against humanity that have occurred, they had to have felt very far removed from non-white communities. Dr. Frances Cress Welsing provides an interesting perspective on the psychological alienation that exists within Amero-Euro culture that can perhaps offer help for western people looking to break the shackles of white supremacy.

Dr. Welsing addresses these feelings of alienation that white people feel across the globe in her *Color Confrontation Theory* asserting that in “all of the present battlegrounds in the world today,” those barriers created by the western world are vivid reflections of this alienation towards others. The destruction and aggressive behavioral patterns displayed through the world by white peoples towards all nonwhite peoples is evidence of the inner hate, hostility, and rejection they feel towards themselves and of the deep self-alienation that has evolved. (18)

During his encounter with the blue being, Strieber knew he was in the presence of something more evolved, and yet his unconscious white supremacist conditioning kicked in, resulting in his alienation of an actual alien.

In *Whos Afraid of Critical Race Theory?* Derrick Bell articulates a well understood but not commonly acknowledged actuality of planet earth. While addressing racial disparity, he demonstrates that those who interact with the western world experience an odd phenomenon of white rage towards melanin, noting that
As history indicates all too well, blacks have suffered greatly as a result of discrimination undergirded and often justified by the general belief in black inferiority. However, history shows with equal clarity, though it is less frequently acknowledged, that indications of black success and thus possible black superiority result in racist outrage. Most of the many race riots in this nation's history were sparked by white outrage over black success. (Bell, 4)

Is Strieber’s response to the dark skin of the extraterrestrials a knee-jerk reaction to black skin or a rejection of black excellence in the form of black evolution? We can only speculate, but history would certainly suggest that this may be a possibility.

The profound alienation that Amero-European white culture has developed for dark skin has evolved into a bias that extends into the cosmos. Intergalactic white supremacy is a new phenomenon for us as a species to begin to discuss. If humans were to begin forging relationships with extraterrestrial races, we cannot afford for diplomats and liaisons to be people who have a history of not accepting excellence in all skin tones. If people of earth were provided access to extraterrestrial propulsion, construction, agricultural and medical technologies it would change the landscape of planet earth in one generation.

Presidents, scientists, governmental officials, experts and researchers from across the globe are doing incredible feats in their disciplines every day only to have moments of clarity where western culture reminds them they are either too blue, brown, black, red or yellow, not white. Earth cannot afford for our collective culture on the planet to be influenced by citizens who have mental breakdowns or severe cognitive dissonance when they witness non-white individuals, of earth or extraterrestrial origin, demonstrate excellence in any field in which the white world believes they dominate.

The next part of the encounter provides the reader with an example of how the western mind responds to a more highly evolved being with darker skin. Stieber became aware of his unconscious skin bias at this moment. Before he could verbalize any discomfort, distaste or
disbelief in the hue of his wards, his mind began to form the thoughts within him. The extraterrestrial beings demonstrated telepathy and the ability to read or sense his feelings. Most consider their opinions to be private and feel their most intimate thoughts only suitable for select people.

The notion that one’s thoughts were unknowingly being read and received by another party in our presence would cause many people to feel vulnerable. It must have been a complete shock to the psyche for Strieber to realize that his thoughts were being received by the dark-skinned beings who were guiding him. At the moment, what he believed to be his secret mind, his private inner thought, or an impression unto himself, provided him with the most critical reflection regarding the racial bias that he had ever experienced. Addressing this moment of clarity, he writes,

The one who had spoken turned again and groaned ruefully, the feeling I got when he did that made me feel terribly uneasy. My inner thoughts had communicated so quickly that they seemed almost to be participating in my mind. But they were completely separate from me, very much themselves. (Strieber, 27)

The notion that these beings possessed some form of telepathic ability and could read his most intimate thoughts disarmed Strieber. His white supremacy was illuminated, forcing him to come to grips with some ugly truths about himself.

This experience further demonstrated Strieber’s perceived inferiority as a white man in comparison to a man of color. It undoubtedly had enormous effects on his mind, identity, and ego. The extraterrestrial, perhaps attempting to be a gracious host, responded to Strieber’s racism the same way that black people, after centuries of hiding true emotions of exhaustion within culturally acceptable responses have done. Across the country people of color are confronted with common everyday western racism, whether it comes in the form of off-color comments at the water cooler or blatant violent hate rhetoric used by the president, all non-white people are
made subject to the privileged behavior of white people. In those moments, black people have had to exhibit superhuman amounts of calm and poise.

Strieber notes how the blue being ‘groaned,’ perhaps in an annoyed but composed manner, like the parent who must redirect an inexperienced young person who is doing something offensive or inappropriate out of ignorance. Similar to the black person at work who has to listen to a white person make racially outrageous comments and then hide behind an excuse of “not seeing color” or worse ignorance, the blue extraterrestrial had to cater to Strieber’s white fragility.

Strieber’s account demonstrates that white/western society has become delusional. Their bias towards non-white skin is influencing their ability to enact their logic. We understand that Strieber's account is just one account, but the response that he had is very similar to how the white collective has acted in the presence of darker skin on planet earth, with an innate feeling of superiority. We as a species cannot allow those who have these opinions to represent the greater earth voice. Since western culture owns the majority of the world’s militaries and powerful governments, we as a species are in serious trouble if those who are making decisions that will affect the entire planet are allowing for their racial bias to influence our relationships with extraterrestrials.

It must be mentioned that in the past, their delusion has always served them. It allowed them to operate in a role that would require a human being to do things to other people that would rob both the victim and victimizer of their humanity. A culture which has transgressed to such an extreme manner should not be in a position to make decisions in our galactic development as a species. White society has gotten to decide the fate of the majority of planet earth for a long time. Planet earth can no longer suffer these indignities. Western culture has
reinforced the belief that its survival is threatened by those who are different, this is not true nor has it ever been true. The next steps in our journey have to be made as a collective, with the voices of all humankind included.

Is Strieber’s experience reflective of the white world’s constant denial in their role as the forefront of those who as Ishmael said, wish to go along and destroy the world? Based on his experience, one would have to agree. This event was so psychologically traumatic for him, this notion of his own racial bias coupled with his inferiority complex in comparison to people who are melanated caused his mind and reasoning ability to shut down. He notes,

When events become strange enough the mind has no context, no terminology in which to place them. Thought stops. One becomes inwardly silent. Recording without comment. When the Spanish conquistador Pizarro stood in the great Inca city of Cuzco, before the assembled crowd of its citizens the sophisticated and civilized Incas were considerably struck dumb. I suspect that they also were victims of strangeness to extreme for their minds to grasp. (Strieber, 27)

Interestingly enough, Strieber compares himself to the indigenous Inca people of what is modern-day Peru. One could see how Strieber, like the Inca, could be struck with disbelief in seeing something so culturally different. However, that is where the comparison becomes open for more direct disagreement. The Inca would have possessed a much more fluid or elastic appreciation for what is possible or how creation could manifest itself. Beliefs in deities like Viracocha or Pachacamac have existed for centuries, so the Inca were used to concepts of beings from beyond with different features; hence they were willing to accept Pizarro. They, like many indigenous cultures, would have a much easier time conceptualizing the blue skin of the beings who Strieber encountered. It seems that Strieber is more like Pizarro in that he is under examination by a different culture and he is the one demonstrating racial superiority based on whiteness. For Strieber, this exposure to an intelligent, more advanced species of dark-skinned peoples created an experience of the sublime for him.
“Whiteness confers unearned privileges on those who happen to be white. This systematic privileging does not apply only to individuals, but to nations as well. Paradoxically then, it's the other races, and the other than white nations, who disappear from the picture where the white people can’t be seen as such.”
Christopher Kelen, *Hymns For And From White Australia* (204)

**Whitley Strieber A Case Study Part 2**

Kelen’s observation causes us to wonder does whiteness, and its unearned privileges go beyond nations? Does it extend into the cosmos? Some may read this interpretation of Strieber’s extraterrestrial encounter as being too critical of his experience. After all, some may posit that he was dealing with individuals from other planets with blue skin. In his daily routine he does not encounter people from other worlds or people with blue skin, so it was only natural that he responds with such crude remarks. Any sensible person would have to empathize with Strieber to some degree. Across cultures, when a person who has a striking physical difference walks among crowds, people in public tend to look on with surprise or interest. Are we all that different than Strieber? One could easily argue that the presence of aliens with blue skin would cause the average person of planet earth to do or say strange things. Would Strieber respond to all aliens with the same disbelief that he exhibited towards the dark-skinned extraterrestrials? Were his reactions based on the stark difference between the blue-skinned being’s features and his own? Alternatively, were Strieber’s responses indicative of how the western mind has been trained to view dark skin of any origin?

Fortunately, we the readers, are given an opportunity to see exactly just how Strieber would respond when presented with aliens who had skin that he found to be more acceptable, skin that was western, skin that did not bring up any unconscious biases, skin that was white like
his own. After his dark-skinned blue aegis brought him through the corridor, we find that Strieber now entered a new chamber with nostalgic colonial western architecture. He remembers

We turned and went through an arched door into a large room. This room was round and had louvered windows. It looked like something like a round version of a regimental dining room from the days of the British Raj in India. All that was missing were ceiling fans with mahogany blades and turbaned servants carrying gin and tonics on heavy silver trays. (Strieber, 28)

In many different extraterrestrial encounters, contactees describe having augmented perceptions or misinterpreting settings. Their ordinary reality is shocked by the presence of an extraterrestrial and the gravity of the experience which results in a skewing of their memories or impressions of the event. Many times, the human mind replaces and fills in missing or distorted information with information, images or memories that we can rationalize. These descriptions are very common in reported contact cases.

This phenomenon results in extraterrestrial contacts occurring in landscapes that fit our mind or memory. The contactee often fills in the unknown aspects of the experience that do not fit into their logical minds with things that are identifiable. It would seem highly unlikely that the extraterrestrial beings present in this contact travel around space on an advanced interstellar ship with decor inspired by popular 19th-century British fashion during their colonial days in India. However, even as a young boy, Strieber was a well-read individual, he makes his lifelong love for literature known in the books he writes. He read the works of Rudyard Kipling and the canon that romanticized colonial life in India. In his writings, he mentions how as an avid reader, Kipling’s work was popular among him and his classmates.

It would seem that what he perceived in the background of his encounter was either a mental projection of his account or perhaps the extraterrestrial beings were allowing Strieber’s consciousness to manifest in the design of the room, to fill in the area with memories or images.
that he found comfortable. Perhaps, it is as Lopez suggests, “whiteness in the postcolonial movement continues to retain much of its status and desirability, if not its overt colonial era power.” (2) It would seem reasonable to deduce that the overt colonial power also influences fashion sense. Maybe, even concerning aesthetics, Strieber’s memory of the physical environment was one that represented the concept of white empire, and so this decor became the setting for the experience.

It is worth noticing how in his experience, the dining room he enters has a “regimental” feel to it, indicating that the atmosphere was one of hierarchy, one that had division, a strict pattern or system of classification. This atmosphere is one that feels at home to Strieber, and it best represents the white supremacist environment from which he originated. This aspect of the setting is essential to analyze, primarily because of the mention of the missing presence of the turbaned Indian servants serving cocktails to their masters. One must wonder how their presence would make the scenario more or less authentic for Strieber? Perhaps it was Strieber’s own unconscious need to see turbaned darker men serving white masters? Strieber does not directly address this. However, we can learn more about his motives when we take a look at how he responds to the whiteness of his next ET encounter.

He starts this segment of the narrative by first acknowledging that the dark-skinned extraterrestrials were no longer to be found noting that “The room was instead filled with beings who were very far from black or blue.” Again, the first thing that Strieber uses as an identifying marker regarding his encounter is skin color. When he meets the next set of extraterrestrials, he immediately notices how they were the opposite of the dark-skinned beings he just encountered. Instead of the contempt for the blue faces that he felt before, he mentions no displeasure with the appearance of the white-skinned extraterrestrials. He seems completely comfortable with the idea
that they were, as he states “as a matter of fact, absolutely white, as white as sheets.” Now, of course, there are individuals on planet earth who have zero to no melanin in their skin. There are some descendants of European people who are extremely white, but finding a human who is “white as a sheet” is not a common thing either. Even an albino person devoid of all melanin is not as white as a sheet.

However, unlike the blue beings whose color made Strieber feel discomfort, these “white as a sheet” beings did not cause Strieber to panic or release any telepathic messages of racial superiority or bias. Their appearance is even more striking when he goes on to describe the white-skinned extraterrestrials saying that “Their skin had a milky translucency one associates with termites. They were all sitting at round tables, wearing uniforms whose design reminded me a little bit of British whites.” (Strieber, 28) When one imagines a skin tone with a “milky translucency one associates with termites” most people would envision the subterranean or the drywood termite. Both of these termites have milky white, clear skin that almost allows you to see inside of their bodies.

If an anthropomorphic being like this dressed in British apparel with translucent white skin and a complex nervous or digestive system were to appear before most humans, most people would find their appearance out of the ordinary and perhaps a cause for alarm. If one could see into their internals, it would be a very uncommon experience. Strieber did not refer to the strangeness of the overly white translucent skin of this extraterrestrial, a stark contrast to his response to the darker skinned being.

In The Gaze of the White Wolf: Psychoanalysis, Whiteness, and Colonial Trauma, Alfred J. Lopez details psychoanalysis and whiteness. He asserts that “Although the stated goal of whiteness studies, following Dyer, is to render whiteness “visible,” much white critique has
shifted attention away from race as a visual signifier of difference and privilege and toward an analysis of whiteness as a cultural imperative.” (156) Strieber’s comfort with the translucent white skin does more than support an argument that he has a bias towards dark skin. In his analysis of whiteness, Lopez continues

Two significant consequences follow from this critical moment of recognition that whiteness is more than skin deep: that (1) for the purposes of social privilege there are gradations of whiteness, which is to say that some people or groups are culturally “whiter” than others; and (2) “white” skin alone does not make one white. One need to consider the “racial” distinctions that have been historically among otherwise “white-looking” peoples, and the fact that those distinctions implicitly stand in opposition to the spurious ideal of “pure” (Euro-Aryan) whiteness, to see at once how and whose favor hierarchies of whiteness have operated. (156)

Strieber has spent his entire life as a part of the dominant group of white Americans. At this moment, perhaps the realization that whiteness had gradations occurred to him. For the first time, he was insecure about his whiteness as other figures enacted a more superior form of whiteness: a cosmic whiteness that superseded his terrestrial whiteness, and a translucent white skin that outclassed his Euro-American complexion.

Strieber’s most insightful realization during this experience came not from the recognition of his subconscious disdain for black skin and melanin. He looks to the milky white beings as the group who provided him with the most clarity about his belief systems. He notes that as he draws closer to these caucasian skinned beings, it was “the first time I had seen the white beings. Later, I would come to regard them with the greatest awe, as the very engineers of transformation.” (Strieber, 29) Evolution comes as it comes, it matters not how a being is inspired to evolve their thought or reasoning, as long as they are developing for the better. Strieber’s interaction with the blue-hued creatures did not influence him to question his racism the way his interaction with the white beings did.

What does this suggest? An alien, an extraterrestrial who is very physically different from
Strieber can significantly influence his perceptions of white supremacy, as long as he has the same skin color. The black alien and the white one caused Strieber to be embarrassed, but the dark-skinned extraterrestrial did not cause him to reflect on his behavior the way the white-skinned extraterrestrial did. Malcolm X famously encouraged his pupils to look up the words “black” and “white” in the dictionary and compare their definitions. The word black has many negative connotations, definitions, and implications while the word white is associated with things of virtue or purity. Many in the western world are taught from a young age to see the world in these black and white instances. Strieber’s western training kicked in during this interaction. In that specific interaction, he regarded the dark-skinned beings as “sinister” while these white beings are acknowledged with the “greatest awe.” He goes as far as considering them the engineers of transformation.

Unfortunately, in this case, Strieber has difficulty hearing the words, understanding the logic or empathizing with nonwhite peoples. The other's perspective on white supremacy or mistreatment is lost on Strieber and much of the western world. Similarly, he had little appreciation for the advancements, wisdom or even color of the blue-skinned beings. He was too busy being horrified by them. Contrarily, he was influenced to change behavior and question his unconscious racial biases because of the influence of the white beings. This revelation begins as soon as Strieber lays eyes on the white aliens. There is something about their demeanor or frequency that felt familiar to him, familiar in a way that spoke to him directly.

He laments “As I approached them they radiated an overwhelming atmosphere of absolutely rigid formality - so strong that I involuntarily returned to my old military school days and snapped to attention. One of the white creatures took me by the hand.” (29) Steyn defines one element of whiteness as “the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural,
political and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized, and rendered
unremarkable.” (121). Perhaps her insight can help us understand how it could be possible for
Strieber to have felt so intrinsically comfortable in this environment? Could the room's
atmosphere coupled with the white skin of the extraterrestrials have made him feel like he was
able to equally share space with them, white man to white alien? Maybe the answer lies in the
rigid formality.

He felt comfortable and was immediately able to match the frequency of his new white
audience. In his descriptions of this experience, Strieber never once seems comfortable enough
around the blue beings to even get to the point of critical thinking. He is so enamored with their
skin tone that he cannot clear his mind enough to think. Strieber is so taken back by their
blackness that he cannot appreciate their function as his wards or what circumstances allowed for
their civilization to have evolved beyond earth’s western accomplishments. When he meets the
white beings whose skin tone is vastly different from his, he is comfortable enough to engage in
conversation, but he is also able to reflect on their position, their habits, and most importantly
how they are behind his transformation.

While he may have felt more at home with the white extraterrestrials than he did with the
black ones, this experience is still out of the ordinary and undoubtedly came with a high level of
discomfort and anxiety. Psychological projection is a defense mechanism people subconsciously
employ to cope with painful feelings or emotions. Psychological projection involves projecting
undesirable feelings or emotions onto someone else, rather than admitting to or dealing with
unwanted feelings. Could it be possible that Strieber in this high anxiety situation was exhibiting
a form of psychological projection toward his white-skinned extraterrestrial handlers?

He goes on to note “I found myself led to the center of the room, where there was a small
tan circle on the floor. I stood in this circle, where I was briefly addressed by what I took to be the leader of the group. His air was extremely formal, even more so than that of the others around me. He seemed full of anger and contempt. He also seemed made to rule.” (29) The leader of this group of white extraterrestrials whom Strieber has identified as the harbingers of transformation is an individual who emits energies of anger and contempt. He is described as being even more formal than his colleagues. Is it no wonder why Strieber acknowledged him as the leader of the group? This individual is exhibiting behaviors that Strieber would perceive to be those of someone in charge.

Strieber compares the regalia and decor of the room and its patrons to be similar to those of the British Empire. Although the United States has been an independent nation for centuries, many of the customs of its British forefathers are still practiced, particularly in formal and official settings involving the state. From his description, one can imagine the demeanor of a white judge in Montgomery, Alabama or Westminster, England, slamming his gavel and demanding order from a raucous chamber of people. Historically, mainly white men have held the commanding position of judge in the western world. Strieber immediately resorted to his training as a white man, to respect and perpetuate respect for white male authority figures like judges, lest one suffer the consequences of being held in contempt or worse, found guilty. When Strieber was interacting with the dark blue beings, he felt that he could not even get a word out. Their presence, their black/blue skin caused him to be speechless. He was only able to utter two words, “You’re blue!” Afterward, it was his thoughts that betrayed him as the blue extraterrestrial was able to surmise his feelings using telepathy. In complete contrast, Strieber has the opposite impression and reaction when he engages in conversation with the white aliens.

Describing the moment, he notes that the white extraterrestrial “proceeded to ask me, in
clipped tones, to explain why the British empire had collapsed! Despite my surprise, I wanted to talk. I found that I had an enormous amount of information at my fingertips.” (Strieber, 30) What a complete change of emotion! Strieber grew up in the United States and is an American citizen. The British empire had lost its explicit prestige as a major world power long before Strieber was born. When provided with an opportunity to pontificate on the rise and fall of the empire, he was all too ready to go into great detail about British reign and dominance over planet earth. A moment ago in the presence of dark skin, Strieber was unable to formulate a full sentence. At this moment in the presence of white skin, he now has an “enormous amount of information at this fingertip” for him to tap access. Did his fear of black excellence jar his mind with such magnitude as to disable his ability to speak? Alternatively, was it simply more natural and reflective of his training as a white man in the western world, to showcase his intelligence and command of history proper by detailing the rise and fall of the British empire? In any event, as he spoke, he realized his shortcomings and misgivings regarding his white supremacy and discomfort with dark skin.

Strieber seems to initially relish this opportunity to engage in the formalities of hierarchy that permeate within western culture. He immediately can match the vibration of his perceived white audience, mimicking the rigidity that he observes, displaying his mastery of the linear history of one of western culture’s most potent iterations of domination on earth. Strieber further takes on the demeanor of his audience, putting base into his voice allowing it to project, a complete change from his timid response to the dark-skinned beings. He recollects “I talked. More, I lectured, my voice booming out in this almost preternaturally quiet place. I went through the various expansions and contractions of the empire” (Stieber, 30) Strieber is an intelligent man who reflects on his experiences. It is while he is on his cosmic soapbox that he realizes the
Stieber saw that white supremacy was at the foundation of what he believed to be western civilization. As he speaks the words aloud, he hears himself articulating an uncomfortable realization that western culture is rooted in white supremacy and the domination of all non-white people of earth. During his tirade, he ends up coming to terms with what western culture is, resulting in him “finally contending that by 1900 it had ceased to have even the appearance of an economic alliance and had become a system by which one race exploited many others.” (30) Here he realizes the influence of white supremacy on his culture. Perhaps this is why Strieber gives so much credit to the white aliens as opposed to the dark-skinned aliens. The white beings allowed him to come to terms regarding western domination of the world, while the blue aliens reminded him of his cultural insecurities.

The blue/black extraterrestrials only reminded him of his culture’s hypocrisy, his cultural shortcomings and his culture’s bias towards dark skin. His time with the blue beings caused him trauma that he did not wish to analyze. These intergalactic black people disrupted his belief system so much that his mind was in a paradox. After all, how could beings that looked like those he had been taught to believe to be inferior possess advanced technology and be more evolved? In that space, his white privilege could not protect him from his white fragility. The situation was too foreign for him to be comfortable with his new conscious awareness of he and western culture’s unnatural and unfounded racial bias. The sinister faces of the evolved galactic black person resulted in his inability to speak. The white beings allowed him to demonstrate his insecurities in a way that did not impede his speech, instead, they caused him to want to evolve past his shameful biases.

Strieber’s experience with the dark-skinned and white skinned extraterrestrials
demonstrate that we live in a world of color. It would suggest that for the western mind, we live in a galaxy and a cosmos of color. If we live in a colorblind world, then why did the skin color of the aliens have such a profound influence of his experience? He realizes that the British empire, which in this instance serves as an allegory represent modern day western empire, is nothing more than a racial classification system that separates white and nonwhite individuals.

During his monologue, he admits that the British Empire “was founded in assumptions of racial superiority which, while they may have been innocent, were so profound as to guarantee that intense separation pressure would follow any general improvement in the educational level and standard of living of its subject peoples.” (30) Strieber’s realization of the skin color divide that is part and parcel to western culture and so-called “modernity” is profound.

When he manifested the words, Strieber began to become suspicious of the reasons for this spectacle noting “They listened to this explanation with what seemed to me as to be too much interest.” As he realizes the entire room is studying his every word and movement he resigns that “they were so faultlessly attentive that I became embarrassed.” Up into that point on Strieber’s colonial tirade, the British Empire was simply a part of world history. They were a group of superior people who advanced the civilization of planet earth through their technological excellence, cunning and innate strong desire to seek out new worlds. It was not until being tasked with explaining why the British empire fell to somebody that he viewed as superior, was he able to realize how racially biased their system of “advancement” is. It was through this exercise that Strieber also realized that this experience was perhaps a test, aimed at the development of his consciousness.

Even with all of those realizations, he nevertheless continues prattling on about the British empire. Why was it so easy for him to address this topic? Whitewashing the unsettling
behavior of western empire is a normal aspect of western culture. The white extraterrestrial caused Strieber to reach a truth for himself. Yet, that did not stop the programming. He goes on to explain “But I ran on and on, spewing names and dates until I was feeling horribly awkward about the whole thing. My ego seemed enormous, and my eagerness to display my false erudition seemed the farcical posturing of a fool. Finally, I could say no more and lapsed into silence.” (30) He talked himself quiet. After he saw that the white extraterrestrials were no longer providing him with false praise for his command of western history, Strieber realized that this was perhaps a test or experience designed to get him in touch with his ego and inner subconscious bias against melanated people as well as his false glorification of the brutality of western culture. When he objectively reflected on his words he saw his culture’s racial bias. He also realized that for his civilization to survive, it would require the continued domination of all nonwhite peoples.

If for a moment he was unsure of whether or not his empire treatise amused his white extraterrestrial audience, his response was quick. According to Strieber, “There was a moment of quiet, and then the room seemed to fill with excited thoughts. “Isn't he wonderful!” “How full of facts!” “How learned!” There was an ugly edge of irony to these thoughts - which I felt rather than heard - that was cold and hard and true.” (30) These white skinned extraterrestrials, similar to the blue/black aliens, demonstrate a telepathic ability. Strieber is specific to note that the room became full of excited thoughts that he was able to understand. In the western world, when a person is sarcastic or condescending, a tone or voice inflection is employed to do so. These extraterrestrial were clearly both telepathic and telemathic, in that they were able to convey, thoughts and could also communicate feelings. Strieber was able to discern the implied meaning of their patronizing words.
It would seem that Strieber's experience reinforces a galactic message for the western world to begin to reflect on. The arrogance of western man represents all that is unnatural when he thinks that he is no longer of the world but instead possesses ownership of the world. It was difficult for Strieber to come to terms with his unconscious racism, and he certainly had to go through a great adventure to have that realization. However, we all do not need to experience a close encounter of the fourth kind with an extraterrestrial for us to begin to practice compassion and equity while letting go of unfounded biases. It does not require the feeling of shame either. In the present moment, we have all of the materials and resources we need to manifest the world we wish to see. For centuries, the dominant western world has forced people to accept their superiority as a race.

Derrick Bell notes that “Race consciousness of this character, makes it difficult for whites ‘to imagine the world differently.’ It also creates the desire for identification with privileged elites. By focusing on a distinct, subordinate 'other,' whites include themselves in the dominant circle—an arena in which most hold no real power, but only their privileged racial identity.” (7) Perhaps here Strieber felt that he could no longer stand behind the power of his white identity. These extraterrestrials, while having skin color like him, did not share in the same ideologies. They did not share the same skin bias.

Strieber makes a point to note “That’s how ashamed of myself I felt. My “empire” fantasies were worse than a joke; they represented dangerously weak thinking.” (30) He calls his empire fantasies a joke. He realized that the inherent racism that is foundational in western society represented a fragmented human race. When Strieber reflects on the idea that any culture based on racial superiority is a culture formed using dangerously weak thinking, he initially takes that as an offense that implies western culture is weak, resulting in him being more than willing
to showcase their military might, which his empire associates with strength.

An empathic reader would see the positive in Strieber’s experience. A compassionate reader would rationalize his emotions and actions, keeping in mind the strange exotic nature of his encounter. He just had a major revelation regarding his inherent racism that he was unaware of a few moments ago. He was humiliated by his own words and ashamed of his own culture. He describes his exit as slinking out, noting how he “was forced by my clothing to move like an arrogant prince - which made me feel even more like a toad. Carrying myself as best as I was able. I left the room.” (31) A critical reader would attempt to see the multi-dimensional nature of Strieber's experience. Was Strieber slinking out because of embarrassment? What was at the heart of his embarrassment? Was there anything else that could have been troubling him? How much was his embarrassment was based on his unconscious white supremacy? Could him falling to the floor and gesticulating in his strange clothing have been a result of his disappointment in his interaction because of his performance? Did he not act white enough? Were the white skinned aliens displeased with him?

Strieber claims to have been interacting with beings that he perceived to be phenotypically white, but that did not give us a clue into the psychology behind their whiteness. Strieber did not have time to reflect on this in the present moment. Whiteness in this contact became a performance of which Strieber became aware. Warren sheds light on how we can interpret Strieber’s response. Of white identity, Warren asserts that “the identity category of white is culturally, historically and situationally specific, with only an illusion of coherence or stability.” (196) He uses John Hartigan’s essay (1996) on white trash to reinforce this idea, pointing out that

Hartigan nicely frames whiteness as performative when he describes an occasion where one does or enacts an incorrect performance of white identity. He notes “By behaving in
a manner considered indecorous by Warrendale whites, those recent arrivals (white trash) are disrupting implicit understandings of “what it means to be white.” Here, the power behind Hartigan's work is the ability to note where and how whites do “white” incorrectly; thus what is given (their whiteness) is questioned. At stake is their identity as white, allowing us to see how race, at least in part, is an accomplishment of doing race. (196)

Perhaps Strieber felt shame in a moment of crises where he was unable to enact the correct version of whiteness to beings he perceived as superior to him. In this exchange, the white aliens were the Warrendale whites and Strieber was relegated to white trash status as a confused newcomer who knew nothing of this even more esteemed way of being white enacted by the extraterrestrials.

One would think that after such a humbling experience and powerful internal realization, Strieber would perhaps make a conscious choice to let go of some of his racial bias. Maybe if given another chance, he would remember the gravity of this experience and treat others with the same regard of respect, no matter their skin tone. Strieber is in the midst of an awkward and uncomfortable situation. At that moment he writes how he “stood there writhing inwardly. At last the two blue ones started beckoning from the doorway.” (31) At last! When Columbus and his men were wandering lost off the shores of the Caribbean, the Tainos found them suffering in their boats and were extremely hospitable in coming to their aide. Columbus repaid them by returning to their islands and massacring the majority of them.

The irony here is that even in space, even in the cosmos, when this white person is suffering at the hands of his bigotry and mental anguish, who is it that comes to his aide? The sinister-looking blue/black extraterrestrials “at last” come to remove Strieber from his incredibly uncomfortable situation. At this moment, as they are taking him away from the white beings who no longer even acknowledge his presence in the room, Strieber has an opportunity to find peace of mind and begin to make amends for his past weak minded thinking towards the blue/black
beings. However, as the adage goes, old habits are hard to break. Upon his exit, Strieber recollects he and his dark yet comely wards “were going down the curving corridor again when one the blue beings looked up at me with his wide face. I saw it clearly this time, and it was really startling horrible. Awful! The eyes glittered as if they were shining black membranes, with something moving behind them that made lumps and pits as it seethed within the eyeball. He smiled, showing the tips of his gray, spongy-looking teeth.” (31) Both the blue/black and the white-skinned extraterrestrial beings demonstrated telepathic ability. We can surmise that during the exit procedure, the blue/black extraterrestrial could sense or hear Strieber’s thoughts. We are unsure if Strieber spoke or if he just thought to himself, however in either scenario, words or feelings of “awful” were permeating in the atmosphere.

The blue/black being, like the people of color of earth, smiled and allowed the white westerner to contend with his insecurities, white fragility, and inability to see past the color of an individual's skin. Perhaps the blue/black extraterrestrial felt empathy for Strieber. Maybe that being came from a galaxy where they were beyond racial superiority, but could still exercise understanding and put themselves in the shoes of Whitley. Alternatively, perhaps the exit encounter with the blue/black being was merely a reflection. When Dr. Cress-Welsing stated that the destruction and aggressive behavioral patterns displayed through the world by white peoples towards all non white peoples is evidence of the inner hate, hostility, and rejection they feel towards themselves and of the deep self-alienation that has evolved, she did not know that her words would also apply to the cosmos as well. Conceivably Strieber’s notion of “awful” was less about the physical appearance of the blue/black being, and more a testament of his inner hate, fear, anger, and alienation.
“You put a nigga in Star Wars, maybe you need 2, then maybe then, we'll believe you”
Common, Black America Again

Conclusion

In The Lost Races of Science Fiction, (1980) Octavia Butler asks if “minority characters—black characters in this case—are so disruptive a force that the mere presence of one alters a story, focuses it on race rather than whatever the author had in mind?” (1) She retorts noting “Yes, in fact, black characters can do exactly that if the creators of those characters are too restricted in their thinking to visualize blacks in any other context.” (1) A constant conversation in my home as a boy revolved around why Lando Calrissian was the only black person in the intergalactic community of Star Wars. While African Americans were happy to see actor Billy Dee Williams in such a major cinematic role, questions of why the future had so many humans of European descent coupled with aliens of many different species, colors, and persuasions, but only one Earthling of African descent?

In the same essay, Butler answers her question noting “No writer who regards blacks as people would get sidetracked into justifying their blackness or their presence unless such justification honestly played a part in the story. It is no more necessary to focus on a character’s blackness than it is to focus on a woman’s femininity.” While this certainly was the case for Whitley Strieber, it does not have to be the case for Amero-European west. Warren wrote that “Whiteness, in many earlier cultural criticism writings, is left analyzed or is simply taken to be the norm upon which the nonwhite other is judged. This is detailed by Dyer’s when he states that whiteness in these mediums is as a “natural, inevitable, and ordinary way of being human.” (191) As we move beyond the age of empire and enter a galactic age, how will whiteness be
analyzed when the nonwhite other is not of this planet? How will the white world contend with knowing that they must share a universe full of nonwhite others?

Would the awareness of nonwhite aliens make the white world feel like even more of a minority? Steyn observes that “An important way in which whiteness holds onto its still dominant and cultural position within the society is through mobilizing established links into the institutional life of the country’s infrastructure” (130) Despite the long history of melanated people and their communication with extraterrestrials, and the extraterrestrial phenomenon’s prominent presence in the ideational culture of African Americans; experiences like Stieber’s demonstrate that whiteness still holds influence on the dominant cultural position regarding alien contact in the west.

In her analysis of white talk in South Africa, Steyn describes how “In order to bolster its position, and counter the minority status of white people in the new South Africa, whiteness in this context draws heavily on the discourses of globalization and internationalism.” (128). An extraterrestrial presence on planet earth is something that would affect the entire population. It would be one of the most widely considered topics of our history, all areas of globalization and internationalism would feel its presence. However, this is why it is important for the American West in particular to consider the ideational culture perpetuated by African Americans who practice African centered cultural concepts. African Americans have a rich history of expressing an awareness of an extraterrestrial presence and communication. For a long time, they have been using their art to represent their reality regarding contact. Steyn posits that the whites in South Africa have attempted to control the language and access to information to maintain power. It would seem plausible to deduce that these same tactics would be employed in the event the west recognized the extraterrestrial presence.
While we shift to a galactic age, we need to be sure that we do not end up like the new South Africa where “Western definitions of issues are preferred, even if these have imperial overtones, and this is regarded as the ‘greater objectivity’ and the avoidance of vested interests.” (129) Warren reminds us that “Whiteness studies can work against the tokenism efforts that keep marginalized groups marginalized and instead critically examine and dismantle the center through a systematic analysis of what it means to be privileged and white in this society.” (198) Perhaps the groundwork for this transformation and analysis can occur when the white gaze is shifted more in-depth towards the cosmos and at an extraterrestrial.
Race in the Galactic Age: Sankofa, Afrofuturism and Whitley Strieber

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