Here and Now: Black Perspectives on Antiutopianism

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The field of utopian studies remains in its infancy. Although scholars established the first Society for Utopian Studies in 1975 and its associated journal in 1988, a consensus on conceptualizing "utopia" did not emerge until 1990. Since then, most scholars have followed Levitas' definition of utopia as "…the expression of the desire for a better way of being" (1990, p. 9), while others follow Sargent's broader definition as a form of 'social dreaming' (1994, p. 3). Yet, despite these developments, utopia remains understudied in political science – a surprising gap given the discipline's focus on power and social structures (Pierson, 2015). As a result, much of the existing scholarship focuses on idealized, distant visions of utopia, reinforcing a tradition characterized by a dichotomy of *elsewhere* and *elsewhere*. This approach conceptualizes utopia as "…simultaneously somewhere and nowhere, a liminal area of possibility and neutrality that exists beyond the saturation of the present" (2024 Society for Utopian Studies Conference, 2024).

Recent scholarship has raised concerns about the decline of utopian thought. For example, Darko Suvin and Patricia McManus (2023) argued that utopianism is in danger (289), as contemporary discourses increasingly reflect a passive resignation to the status quo. According to McManus, people are more inclined to accept the world as it is rather than try to change it (2023, p. 328). This shift, they suggest, stems from a kind of learned helplessness (Balasopoulos, 2023, p. 315; Grison & Gazzaniga, 2019b, p. 564), reinforced by a capitalist system that stifles individuals' capacity for utopian thought (Suvin, 2023, p. 299). They term this phenomenon *antiutopianism*, describing it as a decline in utopian thinking within culture and politics (Suvin & McManus, 2023, p. 289).

However, this conception of *antiutopianism* assumes that the decline of utopian thought is universal, overlooking the perspectives of historically marginalized communities – particularly

Black and Native peoples in the United States. These groups, and others, have long envisioned utopia not as an unattainable ideal deferred to an elsewhere or elsewhen but as a lived reality shaped by *here* and *now*. Black perspectives, in particular, challenge the notion that antiutopianism manifests as passive resignation, instead demonstrating how utopia functions as an active mode of resistance and transformation within systems of oppression. This paper argues mainstream utopian studies have not recognized the Black Utopian tradition, in part because it operates under different names and frameworks. By integrating these perspectives, scholars can reconceptualize antiutopianism as recognizing the individuals' role in challenging and reshaping social structures.

To make this argument, I will first review the historical development of utopian thought. Then, I will situate Janya Brown's (2021) conception of Black Utopia – emerging from **ontological mobility** – within Paget Henry's theory of **creative realism** (2005). The third section will explore how Black Geographic thinkers, such as Christina Sharpe (2016), Rashad Shabazz (2015), and Carolyn Finney (2014) conceptualize Black Utopia as a lived reality shaped in the present. Finally, I will propose reconceptualizing antiutopianism around agency and institutions, incorporating insights from Black Utopian traditions.

The Development of Antiutopianism

A prerequisite to understanding antiutopianism as a concept, first I must establish a broader foundation of utopian thought. Utopia, at its core, is an engagement with alternative possibilities. Whether these possibilities are radical, incremental, or speculative, utopianism serves as a what of questioning what *is* and imagining what could *be*. This has led scholars to define utopia in multiple ways, often overlapping yet distinct in emphasis. The purpose of this section is to understand the foundational arguments of Suvin and McManus in the context of the White Utopian tradition and explore how antiutopianism functions within this framework. To do this, this section will dissect

utopian studies into three approaches: content, form and function. Then, I will outline the mainstream interpretation of utopia as a concept, rooted in a tradition common among western audiences, which I will term White Utopia. By that point, I will be in a good place to outline Suvin and McManus's core theoretical arguments.

Utopianism: Content, Form, and Function

There are endless ways to approach utopian studies, and this subsection does not aim to be an exhaustive review. Instead, it provides an overview of three dimensions that help clarify what utopianism is and how it operates. Scholars generally agree that utopia introduces alternative ways of being, yet these alternatives take many forms and serve different purposes. Whether in literature, political activism, or social imagining, utopia is fundamentally engaged with possibility.

Content: What is Utopia About?

Ruth Levitas (Levitas, 1990, 2013a, 2013b) identifies four ways to think about utopia. The first and the focus of this paper is utopia as an expression of the desire for a better way of living or being (2013a, p. 42). This treats utopia not as a fixed blueprint but as an ongoing search for alternatives. It acknowledges that utopian aspirations shape how people imagine and pursue change, whether at the level of personal transformation or societal reorganization. **For example…**

The second way, which is the most popular approach, sees utopia as an irrelevant fantasy or as a dangerous precursor to totalitarianism (42). Critics argue that utopian visions when pursued rigidly, can justify oppressive structures in the name of an elusive greater good. While this concern is valid, it does not encompass the full range of utopian thought since much of it is open-ended and dynamic, and few are prescriptive. **For example…**

The third way to think about utopia, prefigurative action, situates utopia within social movements and political activism (43). Here, utopianism manifests itself in lived practices – small-

scale experiments, intentional communities, and activist strategies that attempt to embody desired futures in the present. Finally, the fourth views utopia as a holistic outline for an alternative society, a role often reserved for fiction and policy proposals. This comprehensive vision provides frameworks for what a transformed world would look like, whether in speculative literature or political manifestos. **For example…**

Form: How is Utopia Expressed?

Utopianism does not belong to any single discipline or medium. As Sargent explains, "The only generalization I have found it safe to make about utopian literature is that no generalization can be made about it" (T. L. Sargent, personal communication, March 24, 2025, p. 1). Another approach to utopian studies revolves around four broad categories: utopian *literature*, utopian *practice*, and utopian *theory*. Sargent (1994, 2010) has written extensively about these forms but the point is what the concept of utopia *looks like*. Utopian literature, the most familiar, encompasses fictional works that depict ideal or radically different societies.

By contrast, utopian practice refers to real-world efforts to create better ways of living, often through social movements, political initiatives, scholarly interventions, and intentional communities. These efforts can be small in scale, like **EXAMPLE**, or grand, like Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations (Woolf, 1940). Finally, utopian theory analyzes the conditions under which utopian thinking emerges and its role in political and social change. It includes critical examinations of ideology, power, and the relationship between imagination and action. **For example…**

Function: What Does Utopia Do?

There remains, however, a third approach to utopian thought which revolves around what the concept of utopia *does*. Drawing on Levitas (1990) Fernando and others (2018) identify the three key functions of utopianism: change, critique, and compensation. Utopia as *change* refers to

its capacity to inspire transformation, whether in individuals or society. Utopia as *critique* highlights its role in challenging existing structures by imagining alternatives. Finally, utopia as *compensation* suggests that utopian visions serve as psychological or ideological refuges, offering hope or *escape* in response to dissatisfaction with the present.

Lezar (2021) extended this discussion by introducing utopian *rhetoric*, how utopian language and symbols are used to inspire, persuade, or mobilize action. This rhetorical function highlights that utopia is not merely an abstract idea, but an active force in political discourse and cultural expression, inseparable from *praxis*.

In a Phrase: Better Ways of Being

At its core, utopianism is about envisioning *better* ways of being. For this paper, utopia is best understood as a dynamic model of engagement – as a process – rather than a specific goal (Ghodsee, 2023; Jameson, 2005; Johns, 2010, p. 45). It is a continual effort the rethink and reshape the world, often operating in ways that are not immediately recognized as "utopian." **For example…**

Understanding these dimensions of utopia – content, form, and function – provides the necessary foundation for the discussion that follows. The next section examines how utopian ideas have historically developed, tracing their evolution and the tensions that have persisted throughout time.

White Utopia

The concept of utopia has long been entangled with the tension between *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*, a dichotomy that predates the term itself. Under this view, utopia is simultaneously a description and an assertion – that whatever Utopia is, it must always be someplace or sometime *other than* here or now. In this way, elsewhere refers to the physical limitations of a utopian vision:

it is not *here*. Whether imagined as a distant island, a hidden city, or an undiscovered continent, utopia exists beyond wherever we are. Conversely, *elsewhen* refers to a temporal dimension – it is not *now*. Utopia often belongs to a lost golden age, a promised future, or an alternative timeline beyond the present. These two dimensions – elsewhere and elsewhen – are foundational to understanding how utopianism has been perceived to function throughout history. This subsection explores how utopia has historically been framed in relation to space and time, tracing its evolution from religious myths to political philosophies, science fiction, and beyond.

Utopias of Escape: Religion and Myth

Utopian thought can be traced back to early human myths and classical spiritual traditions. These "utopias of escape" envisioned ideal worlds free from human suffering, often located in a distant paradise or an afterlife (Dutton, 2010; Sargent, 2010, pp. 30–39). These narratives often include positive components, like abundance (food was plentiful), and negative aspects, like security (there was no fear). The most influential examples include the Grecian Age of Heros (For Example…) or religious concepts of a lost Paradise (For Example…). In this way, elsewhere included places like the Garden of Eden whereas elsewhen included a return to a lost era of brilliance.

Utopia as Festivals and Holidays

As societies evolved alongside political systems, utopia took on new forms. One example is the role of festivals and holidays as "temporary utopias." The ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia, for instance, temporarily inverted social hierarchies, suspending normal rules and allowing for revelry and equality (Sargent, 2010, p. 36). These events suggest that utopia was sometimes envisioned as an existing *here* and *now*, but only fleeting. In this way, elsewhere was suspended within ordinary life but distant from daily existence. Similarly, the elsewhen was temporarily violated, but was often fleeting.

Political Utopias: Philosophy and the New World

Many scholars credit Plato's *Republic* as the first explicitly political utopia, though others argue that the Greek polity of Sparta had greater influence (Sargent, 2010, p. 37). Unlike mythic utopias, these early models neither proposed structures nor exact plans for society. Instead, these kind of "political utopias" proposed easy to communicate narratives that highlight specific values like stability and justice.

The most enduring utopian vision comes from Thomas More's *Utopia* (2014). More coined the term "utopia" by combining the Greek *ou* (not) and *topos* (place), meaning "no-place" (Vieira, 2010, p. 171). Yet, within the text itself, More's utopians argued that their society should instead be called *eutopia* (good place) because it actually exists (178). This dual meaning – utopia as both an impossible ideal and a potentially real project – creates a lasting tension that continues to define utopian thought.

During the Renaissance, utopian aspirations were combined with colonial expansion and imagined geographies. European explorers saw the "new world" as an opportunity to realize ideal societies, often at the expense of indigenous peoples. Utopia became associated with faraway lands and a future society that could be achieved with rational planning, reinforcing the *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* dichotomy.

With the enlightenment period and industrialization, utopia evolved again, shifting from geographic fantasies to speculative futures. The genre frequently depicts utopia as the result of scientific progress, space exploration, or technological breakthroughs (Pohl, 2010). May Wollstonecraft Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1993) originally written in 1818 is an early example, demonstrating how utopian ambitious – such as overcoming death (Chapter 4) – can lead to unintended consequences.

Modern science fiction continues this tradition, offering both utopian and dystopian visions. Franchises like *Star Wars* (1977-), *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022), and *The 100* (2014-2020) illustrate the precarious balance between utopian hope and dystopian collapse. These narratives help distinguish between three key concepts.

Eutopia suggests that despite how bad things may seem, they *will* improve (Lane, 2012). **Dystopia** warns that the pursuit of utopia *may* lead to disaster while acknowledging the need for change (Popper, 2020). **Anti-Utopia** argues that attempting utopian transformation is *inherently dangerous*; it is better to maintain the status quo (Fitting, 2010, p. 19).

A common anti-utopian theme is that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions."[1] Unlike dystopias, which critique flawed utopias while still advocating for change, anti-utopias suggest that utopian striving itself is the problem.

The Intersection of Elsewhere and Elsewhen

Over the course of history, utopianism has shifted from religious paradises to political models, science fiction, and critical dystopias. Yet, one theme remains constant: utopia is situated in the tension between *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*. It is never truly here or now but only exists as a possibility beyond the present. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing the emergence of antiutopianism (anti-utopia without the hyphen), a concept that will be explored in the following section.

Antiutopianism

[1] This is an idiom meaning that people who harm others often try to justify themselves by explaining that their intentions were good. However, this often comes about because, despite their intentions, unintended consequences lead to unintended suffering. That suffering is not alleviated by the fact that the actor's intentions were not malicious.

In recent years, utopian thinking has not only been dismissed but actively undermined, especially in the study of world politics and international relations. While dystopias and anti-utopias warn against specific dangers, *Antiutopianism*, as defined by Dargo Suvin and Patricia McManus (2023), goes further – it argues that any attempt at utopia is doomed from the start. Antiutopianism does not simply caution against idealism or unintended consequences: it denies the possibility of meaningful change altogether. It asserts that trying is pointless – that attempts at utopia *will* always fail.

Disillusionment with utopia is not a new phenomenon. The 20th century alone witnessed numerous events that rival or surpass contemporary crises: the Spanish flu pandemic, the Great Depression, two world wars, the Holocaust, the Cold War, and the conflicts in Vietnam and Korea. Each of these events brought waves of suffering and despair on a scale unprecedented in human history. Yet, despite the depth of these crises, they did not erase utopian thought; rather, they fueled new visions of alternative worlds. The term *dystopia* itself predates these atrocities, first appearing in the late 1800s (Claeys, 2010, pp. 107–108). What is distinct about the contemporary period, however, is not the presence of crisis but the intensifying discourse that seems to actively reject the premise of utopian dreaming.

Some of the most succinct criticisms come from Kwame Antwi-Boasiako (2014), who likened utopias to myth: "Utopianism, therefore, is a myth, which can only be inspirational but not pragmatically achievable because of its intangible proposed theories" (34). Other arguments take political and ontological positions, asserting that any attempt at utopia *inevitably* leads to totalitarianism (Davis, 1983) or is incompatible with human nature (Hillam, 1980).[2] In political science,

[2] Hillam only addressed this argument. I mention it because it is a claim I have often heard in colloquial terms which Hillam breaks down and addresses in a systematic and charitable manner.

many scholars assume that idealism died with the onset of World War II and the horrors of the German concentration camps. While acknowledging the importance of social dreaming, there is still a tendency to dismiss it for the sake of "realism" (Booth, 1991; Reus-Smit & Snidal, 2009).[3] This has led to a general decline in the social value of utopian thinking, culminating in passive resignation to accept the world as it is rather than attempt to change it. McManus and Suvin (2023) have termed this widespread disillusionment as Antiutopianism (anti-utopia without the hyphen). Although Suvin initially introduced this argument in *Disputing the Deluge* (2021), McManus and Suvin further developed it in the *Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies,* calling for collaboration with other scholars to clarify contemporary antiutopianism (2023, p. 291). This paper, in large part, is a direct response to their call.

According to Suvin, the origins of antiutopianism lie in the prevailing economic system, which characterizes history itself as an ongoing and endless atrocity (Suvin, 2023, p. 294). Just as art reflects life, narratives increasingly reflect a capitalist worldview, resulting in an inability to imagine alternative possibilities (296). This is adjacent to international scholars who focus on the structural conditions of world regimes (Dos Santos, 1970; Galtung, 1971; Lake et al., 2021; Reus-Smit, 1997; Ruggie, 1998).

The argument runs as follows: because capitalism depends on a certain degree of consent (or at least perceived free will), the system partially depends on submission. To secure its perpetuation, the system fosters worldviews that encourage submission in the face of undesirable alternatives. As people see fewer alternatives, they are more likely to accept the status quo. The result is contemporary resignation after generations of submission and centuries of capitalism refining

[3] Reus-Smit & Snidal do not make this claim, but their paper highlights the attitude they share with the scholarly community toward utopianism (which they call idealism).

its mechanisms of control. In institutional analysis, this approach is akin to discouraging all attempts at institutional change, from "institutional entrepreneurs" to ordinary people (Blyth, 2002; Campbell, 2004a, 2004b; Emmenegger, 2021; Lieberman, 2002; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). As McManus remarked while discussing an earlier draft of this paper (Zarate, 2025) "Politics is downstream from culture." Antiutopianism, in this sense, first operates in culture before shaping political reality. When narratives reinforce the idea that no real change is possible, resignation follows, and the status quo becomes self-perpetuating.

To illustrate the pervasiveness of antiutopianism, Suvin points to *coronization,* a concept describing the weaponization of COVID-19 to stifle utopian efforts. If utopianism offers unapologetic scrutiny of existing systems (Brincat, 581, p. 34), then utopianism becomes a primary threat to capitalism. COVID-19, with its wide-reaching social, economic, and political disruptions, proved to be an ideal vehicle for disillusioning would-be utopians.

Following Suvin's discussion, McManus and Lazar Atanasković pointed to the television show *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) as an example of antiutopianism's cultural dominance. The show follows noble families, reminiscent of those in medieval Europe, as they vie for regional dominance. Their tactics include war, deceit, and all the drama associated with warring kingdoms. What makes the program unique in McManus's argument is that the world in which the families fight is neither dystopian nor anti-utopian. Even dystopias acknowledge that change is possible, but *Game of Thrones* presents a world where change is impossible. No matter what, conflict and all of its horrors will continue indefinitely. While dystopias typically offer a cautionary tale – akin to the idiom "Be careful what you wish for" – *Game of Thrones* suggests not only that this is the way things are, but also that *this is the only way things can be*.

As McManus explained, the show highlights "A fiction that has no use for utopia at all, one in which there is no object of parody or satire but only of relentless, serious, pragmatic insistence that this is the way things are…one that acts as though it has vanquished utopia itself" (2023, p. 328). Atanasković took this further, hypothesizing that the targeted audience consists of those who play the biggest role in maintaining the status quo (Atanasković, 2023, p. 340).[4]

While I do not disagree with Suvin, McManus, or Atanasković regarding their assessments of antiutopianism's cultural dominance, I argue that its totalizing narrative requires closer scrutiny. Utopia is not merely about envisioning alternatives – although that is certainly an integral part of it. *Eutopia* helps people cope with hardship by envisioning a better future. *Dystopia* has historically emphasized the need to balance idealism with realism – to make informed decisions when bridging theory and practice (Hardcourt, 2022). *Anti-utopia* serves as a cautionary tale, warning against overreach. All of these forms of thought acknowledge the potential for change – regardless of whether that change is desirable. However, antiutopianism denies the possibility of change altogether. As McManus and Suvin describe it, antiutopianism mirrors what psychologists would call *learned helplessness* (Grison & Gazzaniga, 2019b, p. 564) on a mass scale: the *belief* that no action can change one's fate.

Black Utopia

Black utopian thought offers a necessary challenge to the totalizing narrative of antiutopianism. While antiutopianism denies the possibility of change, Black utopia insists on transformation within the key structures designed to foreclose it. Unlike conventional utopian thought, which often posits an *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* characterization of utopia, Black utopia emerges in

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[4] Verbatim: "The aimed-at audience of [the Game of Thrones TV Series] is the class fraction of white-collar corporate employees in countries of the richer world and to some degree in the poorer periphery, which is most necessary for the reproduction of contemporary stakeholder capitalism."

the *here* and *now*, forged in the struggle against social exclusion, historical erasure, and systemic violence. It does not reject dystopian awareness but instead mobilizes it as a site of resistance, survival, and creative world-making.

This section examines how Black thinkers have articulated a distinct utopian tradition that operates beyond conventional frameworks of utopian thought. First, I lay out and then question the conventional position of Black utopianism utopian studies. Then, I engage with the structural conditions shaping Black existence – particularly the concepts of *dysselection* and *social death* – to illustrate how exclusion from traditional notions of humanity has necessitated alternative modes of utopian thought. From there, I explore Janya Brown's (2021) theorization of Black utopia as a spatial-temporal intervention via *ontological mobility* and Paget Henry's *creative realism* (2005) as a counterpoint to antiutopian despair. Finally, I turn to the concept of *Otherwise Worlds* as presented in Tiffany King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith's collection of essays by the same name (2020b).

Origins of Black Utopia

As a tradition primarily concerned with the lived experiences of the Black diaspora – those peoples whose histories have been shaped by the transatlantic slave trade and ongoing racial subjugation – Black utopia has often been neglected or unrecognized. Unless canonical utopian literature, which often materializes the fears, anxieties, and hope in the face of potentialities, Black utopianism exists in direct response to systemic oppression forced displacement, and historical erasure.

Still, Black utopian visions have long existed and developed primarily in tandem with the treatment of Black folk in the United States. The earliest known utopia by an African American, *Black: or the Huts of America* (M. R. Delany, 2017), first appeared in 1859, yet it remains absent

from many canonical discussions of utopian literature.[5] Delany was a renowned political activist and scholar who spearheaded the Black nationalist movement, and following him, other Black utopian writings emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Scholars often credit the first Black utopian novel to Sutton Grigg's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) largely because it fits most conventional definitions of utopian literature (Adamik, 2020; Roemer, 2010, p. 134; T. L. Sargent, personal communication, March 24, 2025). Later, Griggs also produced *Dorlan's Plan: A Dissertation on the Race Problem* (1902). W. E. B. Du Bois also contributed to Black utopian literature with *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (2004), *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1999), and *Dark Prince* (1995), though his more well-known works, such as *The Souls of Black Folk* and "The Comet," do not fit within a strict utopian framework (Adamik, 2020; T. L. Sargent, personal communication, March 24, 2025). Still, others have argued they depict racial transformation through speculative and existential lenses that are conventionally utopian in nature (Harper, 2022; Zamalin, 2019, p. 53).

What distinguishes Black utopian thought from its White counterparts is the ever-present reality of racism. As Alex Zamalin notes, "As ideologies and instruments for developing global capitalism and modern political states, race, and white supremacy have been central to modernity" (Zamalin, 2019, p. 11). Racism, in this sense, follows the systematic conditions that lead to "premature death" (Gilmore, 2023, p. 88; Paris, 2024, p. 5). Consequently, Black utopianism, as recognized by conventional utopian scholars, does not merely seek an ideal society – it interrogates and resists the structures that have systematically excluded Black subjects from the realm of the possible.

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[5] I credit Lyman Sargent for pointing me in the direction of this text (personal communication, March 24, 2025).

However, I argue that Black utopianism is more than this. If one takes a more expansiveutopia as *alternative* ways of being – not necessarily *better* (Booth, 1991, p. 535; Brown, 2021, pp. 6–7; Dutton, 2010, p. 224; Levitas, 2013a, p. 43; Nicholson, 1998, p. 66) – then an entire world of Black utopian literature and scholarship comes into the foreground. This aligns with Bloch's *utopian impulse*, emphasizing human autonomy and the potential for change (Bloch et al., 1986; Levitas, 1990, p. 42) without neglecting the "…dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which [groups] arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society…" (Sargent, 2010, p. 5) while also capturing the most imaginative, creative, and politically salient aspects of Black culture – the *Black fantastic* (Iton, 2008; Zamalin, 2019, p. 10). Under this view, Black utopian thought rarely confirms to recognized conceptions of utopia; instead, it frequently manifests itself as an ongoing negotiation with oppression, imagining liberation within and despite conditions of subjugation in spaces that are at once atemporal and multidimensional.

Spatial-Temporal Utopias: Brown's Framework

Janya Brown began *Black Utopias* (2021) by explicitly seeking non-European approaches to utopian studies. She explained, "I am not interested in tracing utopian blueprints or totalizing remedies, but I am fascinated by how people have envisioned utopian worlds – in, through, and outside of the European tradition, which is long." To that end, she sought "black quotidian practices and visions of communality, sociality, and kinship already operating outside the bounds of normalizing imperatives" (10) and "Rather than postponing to a 'then and there,' as [José] Muñoz refers to his conceptualization of futurity [in *Cruising Utopia* (2019)], I argue for a spatial-temporal fold within the *here and now*" (2021, pp. 8, emphasis added). This conceptualization of Black utopia directly challenges the *elsewhen* and *elsewhere* dichotomy. Further, by highlighting the role of

everyday acts of survival, community formation, and cultural production, Brown also challenges antiutopianism itself.

Throughout *Black Utopias*, Brown examines how Black thinkers, artists, and spiritual leaders have created utopian visions rooted in radical experimentation, spirituality, and alternative social configurations. She examined figures such as Sojourner Truth, Alice Coltrane, and speculative fiction writers like Octavia E. Butler to demonstrate how Black utopianism manifests in spiritual transcendence, aesthetic practices, and communal world-making. Brown's analysis extends to the broader conceptual realm of Black **ontological mobility**, arguing that Black existence itself is marked by an ability to see past the dominant worldviews of reality. For example, Coltrane's ashram represents a reimagining of communal existence that blends Black radicalism with Eastern spiritual traditions (60-73). In discussing Coltrane's views on Eastern influences, Brown explained:

> Black consciousness no longer had to be understood as limited to a history of slavery and European indoctrination; a collective sense of self was no longer lost in the irrevocable break of the Middle Passage. The black self was freed to explore and ally with the established sets of beliefs and traditions outside a Western episteme. (Brown, 72)

Similarly, Truth's itinerant ministry created spaces where Black women could assert agency and cultivate collective power outside of dominant social norms (24-40). In discussing the life of itinerant preachers more broadly, Brown explained:

> The precarity of life for black people showed the boundaries between the living and the dead as porous. People in the nineteenth century generally had a much more intimate relationship with mortality; death was always close and often long and painful. In Jackson's

> account,[6] instances of death are rarely accompanied by mourning or grief; they are met with grim, unceremonious acceptance, in contrast to the sentimental and ornate mourning practices and funereal rite common among the white middle classes of the later 1 800s. (Brown, 48)

These examples highlight how Black utopianism is not about escaping reality but about forging alternative ways of being within it. In this way, scholarship that focuses on conventionally "utopian" literature obscures more influential expressions of Black *radicalism* (27). As Brown emulated, "The art and practices I consider involve a *radical refusal* of the terms by which selfhood and subjectivity are widely lived and understood. Along the way arise questions of desire and fulfillment, seemingly key concepts at the heart of utopian thought" (8). In this way, utopia is an active, present-tense endeavor – one that unfolds in simultaneity with struggle rather than after it.

Dysselection and Social Death

Looking at Black utopias in this way suggests a remarkable implication: that antiutopianism has not affected the Black community in the same way it has shaped mainstream utopian studies. Unlike the its White counterpart, Black utopian thought seems especially resistant to forces that would otherwise render people subject to the learned helplessness that antiutopianism supports. The natural question to follow is what produced this divergent tradition. Brown's main argument in *Black Utopias* goes like this:

> My claim is that because black people have been excluded from the category *human*, we have a particular epistemic and ontological mobility. Unburdened by investments in belonging to a system created to exclude us in the first place, we developed marvelous modes of being in and perceiving the universe. (Brown, 7).

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[6] One of Truth's fellow Black itinerant preachers.

This mobility is not a privilege but a consequence of dispossession, forced migratioin, and historical negation. Sylvia Wynters (2003) described this exclusion through the concept of **dysselection** – a process wherein society, rather than nature, determines who is unfit to survive. Dysselection operates as a racialized mechanism that erases Black histories, denies Black personhood, and renders Black lives disposable. Brown echoes this idea, integrating insights from Samuel R. Delany's *Babel 17* (2001) and *the Einstein Intersection* (1998) arguing that humanness is a limited condition and Blackness itself has the potential to transcend into a blissful unknown. After asking "What would it mean to let go of the assumption of human superiority and open up to new forms of sociality and modes of being?" (133). Then, explaining the performer Sun Ra's position, Brown explained:

> "Ra's agenda could be assessed as one of creating a new genre of the human, one completely outside an ontology based in dominant notions of the human…Black people must let go of ideas of the (earth)man and not only face but join the void, the nothing, a place we cannot know. (173)
>
> Giving up death, for black people, meant release from the limiting and painful constraints of earthly existence under the human regime. (176)

Dysselection, then, manifests in tangible ways: through historical revisionism, systemic violence, and the erasure of Black contributions to knowledge and culture. Black subjects are not only ignored, they are frequently hunted down, victimized, and subjected to injustices that the historical record has frequently erased, modified, or forgotten (McKittrick, 2006; Nieves, 2007). Here it is worth pointing out that this experience is not restricted exclusively to the Black diaspora but is relevant to other marginalized communities, especially indigenous peoples (Harvey, 2021).

However, given the scholarship I have reviewed, this paper will focus on Black utopianism as representative of this argument.

The consequences of this exclusion are captured by the concept of **social and figurative death**, which Christina Sharpe (2016, pp. 17, 21) described as "…the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation on television and social [that] make domination in/visible and not/visceral…it registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future" (21). This is not simply political exclusion – it is an ontological state in which Black subjects are denied agency, belonging, and recognition. As Martin Delany wrote in the early 19th century:

> These provisions then do not include the colored people of the United States; since there is no power left in them, whereby they may protect us as their own citizens. Our descent, by the laws of our country, stamps us with inferiority – upon us has this law worked corruption of blood. (2020, p. 41)

In this context, utopia is not an abstracted ideal but a survival strategy. The conception of utopia as *elsewhere* or *elsewhen* for the Black subject is incoherent – it is woven into the everyday acts of resistance, creativity, and meaning-making that allow Black communities to persist despite systemic negation. In this way, the utopian impulse for the Black subject is:

> "To do as we have always done [which marks] the fact that otherwise possibility is not tending toward a future that is to come but is in the marking of the practices that we have and do and carry with care and love for one another against the imposition of settler colonial violence, the violence that is coarticulated with anti-Blackness to produce the modern crisis of racialization, the theft of the ground and air, and the strangulation of life possibilities" (Crawley, 2020, p. 35).

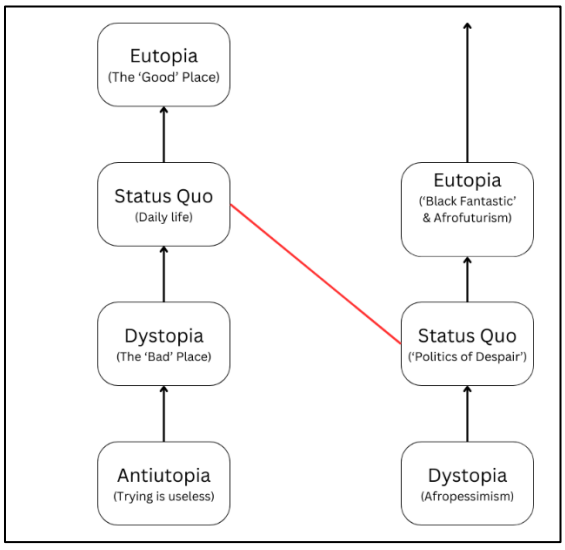
This view raises an important question: What is ontological mobility beyond its origins? One way to understand this concept is through Paget Henry's (2005) introduction to African phenomenology – an approach to scholarship that emphasizes internalized perceptions that maintain a "taken-for-granted" status (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 42; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015, pp. 12–15). Henry describes this as "…the self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of the consciousness of African peoples, after [they] have been displaced by de-centering techniques practiced in these cultures" (79). Henry's main argument was that African phenomenology has been rendered obscure by mainstream European phenomenologies (82) – an argument that parallels the one presented here. After tracing the original metaphysics of African phenomenology through Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Lewis Gordon, Henry terms **creative realism** as "the experiences of Africana peoples and the distinct knowledge producing practices that were developed under the world shattering conditions of racialization and colonization" (110). Unlike European metaphysical traditions, which ground universality in rationality and cultural continuity, Africana phenomenology recognizes the fluidity of identity and the multiplicity of lived experience (79-80).

This helps explain in what ways Black utopia operates differently from more mainstream approaches to utopian thought. Black existence has been shaped by constant movement, adaptation, and resistance – conditions that necessitate an alternative approach to utopian imagining. In this way, utopianism is not merely a project of rationally designing or striving for a better society, but an ongoing negotiation with being, survival, and transformation within oppressive structures.

One way in which these differences materialize is in distinct conceptual frameworks – a different lexicon – and building on this, I highlight why antiutopia does not fit within Black utopianism. Different subjects experience eutopia, dystopia, and the status quo in fundamentally

different ways. For the White subject, the status quo is a livable condition – neither ideal nor catastrophic – and eutopia is an aspirational improvement while dystopia is a feared collapse. It naturally follows, then, that antiutopia, suggests that striving for a better world is futile.

However, for the Black subject, the status quo is *already* dystopian – defined by systemic oppression and negotiation – a kind of **politics of despair** (Sexton, 2020). Eutopia is not an abstract ideal but a mode of survival found in the **Black Fantastic** and **Afrofuturism**, which includes "The quotidian, ordinary, everyday nature of these violent incidents [which] produce within us a restiveness, a restlessness, a desire to exist otherwise. It's the violence that is the daily experience of the Black flesh…against which those of us committed to justice must contend" (Crawley, 2020, pp. 27–28). Dystopia, rather than being a distant threat, is the present reality – a framework often associated with **Afropessimism,** which is an "unflinching critique of human *capacity*, rather than a critique of unethical and/or discriminatory acts performed" (Wilderson & King, 2020, p. 57). If the status quo is already dystopian, then antiutopia makes no sense. For Black utopians, transformation is not a naïve hope but an urgent necessity, emerging through lived experience rather than deferred idealism further underscoring the challenges of applying an *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* dichotomy to Black utopia. For a visualization of this scheme see **Figure 1**.



It might be argued that dystopia is not merely about those who are on the receiving end of violence since violence permeates and infects all those involved. In this way, daily life for the White subject is not as livable as I have suggested. However, while it is true that systems of violence shape all social relations, the crucial distinction lies in how that violence is structured and distributed. The status quo may be anxiety-inducing or even precarious for the White subject, but it does not systematically position Whiteness itself as disposable or non-human *in the same way* anti-Blackness does for the Black subject. The violence that afflicts the White subject under conditions of dystopia is often framed as an expectation, a deviation from an expected norm of stability and security. In contrast, for the Black subject, this violence is not an aberration but a foundational condition – one that structures existence itself. As Kind explained, quoting Hortense Spiller (1987):

> This sociopolitical "order with its human sequence written in blood, represents for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile." The human and its "sequence" or repetition and arrangement for its continuance is a mode of being that requires genocide, mutilation, displacement, and the negation of Black and Indigenous peoples and their way of living. (King, 2020, p. 85)

While suffering under dystopian conditions may indeed create psychological and social strain for all subjects, the structural positioning of Blackness within a framework of ongoing dispossession and negation demands an urgent reimagining of world-making—one that does not hinge on a distant elsewhere or elsewhen but instead insists on the possibility of otherwise in the here and now.

Otherwise Worlds

The concept of **Otherwise Worlds** extends Black utopian thought even further, exploring how Black and Indigenous existence disrupts and reconfigures dominant understandings of time,

place, and possibility. This section shows how *Otherwise Worlds* (King et al., 2020b) conceptualizes utopia in non-utopian terms as a kind of *nowhere* – a space that is neither fully present nor entirely absent, existing in the tension between displacement and radical world-making. The term itself, "otherwise," carries multiple meanings: as something different, as contradiction to the present order, as an imaginative refusal, as a radical, affective engagement with the world. Otherwise Worlds does not seek an escape to a utopian future or an alternative physical space but instead cultivate practices of survival, refusal, and transformation within the constraints of the present (King et al., 2020a) In this way, Blackness exists beyond property, beyond recognition, and beyond the "god-terms that structure Western political and religious thought (Carter, 2020, p. 195). Similarly, diaspora studies is not simply a historical review of European imperialism but also a long-standing refusal of its terms (Walcott, 2020, p. 345). These perspectives reinforce the claim that Black utopia is grounded in a mode of world-making that is simultaneously a response to exclusion and a framework that insists on transformation within the present.

The connections between Indigenous Studies and Black utopia further demonstrates how *otherwise worlds* disrupt historical narratives and capture the quotidian aspects of utiopian thought. For instance, Black radical sacrality refuses redemptive models of the sacred and situates spirituality as indictment to political volitility; the result is an emphasis on alternative "genres" of life (Carter, 2020, p. 169). Similarly, the phrase "*What is Past is Prologue*" inscribed on the United States' National Archives building illustrates how colonial histories are preconditions for national progress (Harvey, 2021). Even the notion of sovereignty has been criticized as a function of domination, producing forms of disappearance that render survival legible only through assimilation (Smith, 2020, p. 126). Finally, Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism emphasize that survival and resistance happen through community support (Nixon, 2020).

Overall, *Otherwise Worlds* helps definitively reject the notion of a Black antiutopia. As with the Black subject, Indigenous scholars have argued that the present is already dystopian – what Molly Swain (Swain & Vowel, 2017) termed the *dystopian now* (Nixon, 2020, p. 332). However, this dystopia is not merely a site of suffering; it is also where alternative forms of knowledge, kinship, and world-building emerge. The upshot is that Black and Indigenous thinkers refuse the foreclosure of possibility that antiutopianism assumes, instead turning to practices of survivance that imagine and enact futures within dystopian conditions (333). This is not merely theoretical; the spatial practices of Black life actively construct and sustain these alternative worlds in real-time. Black geography, as both a field of study and a lived reality, reveals how these practices manifest materially, offering a direct challenge to the notion that utopia exists only in a distant elsewhere or elsewhen.

Black Geography

If utopia is the expression of a desire for an alternative way of being, then Black Geographies reveal how that desire takes shape in the *here* and *now*. Rather than treating utopia as an imagined future, Black geographic thinkers show that alternative ways of living already exist within the special practices of Black life. From the persistence of marooned communities to contemporary urban activism, Black geography offers a material and political counterpoint to the idea that utopia is deferred and antiutopianism is on the rise.

As a discipline, Black Geographies study the spatial relationship between Black life, oppression, and radical imagination (Hawthorne, 2019). It highlights how anti-Black racism is not only ideologically but also physically embedded in the built environment, structuring vulnerability to premature death while simultaneously shaping resistance. As McKittrick (2006) argued, Black

geographies encompass both real and imagined conditions of Black life (x), illustrating how space itself is a site of struggle, transformation, and possibility.

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) offers a concept of the "wake" that extends beyond the legacy of slavery into the present. While the wake signifies the aftereffects of slavery, Sharpe argues that Black survival within this context is a form of active resistance. Through an interdisciplinary approach blending personal narratives, historical analysis, and cultural criticism, Sharpe's work emphasizes how Black life in the wake is shaped by systemic violence and exclusion. Yet, she argues that Black communities engage in "wake work," practices that affirm life and resist the forces of anti-Blackness. This work occurs in the everyday actions of survival, making Black life itself an act of resistance and an ongoing process of world-building in the present. By engaging with the wake, Sharpe's scholarship provides a powerful empirical example of how Black communities actively resist the legacies of slavery and imagine new futures within the constraints of ongoing historical trauma.

Rashad Shabazz's *Spatializing Blackness* (2015) focuses on how urban environments, particularly in Chicago, function as tools of racial control. Shabazz explores how architecture and urban planning, especially in high-rise public housing projects, constrain Black mobility and reinforce surveillance. These spaces, often designed as solutions to poverty, mirror carceral environments, trapping residents within racialized boundaries. However, Shabazz also highlights empirical examples of resistance, particularly through the cultivation of green spaces such as urban farms. These green spaces offer opportunities for reclaiming autonomy and challenging the oppressive urban design. Shabazz's work shows how Black communities transform their environments, turning sites of racialized control into spaces of resistance and empowerment, thereby providing a tangible example of Black utopian practices in the present.

Carolyn Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces* (2014) examines the racialized relationship between Black people and nature, focusing on the historical exclusion of Black communities from outdoor spaces. Finney argues that environmental spaces, traditionally seen as "white spaces," have long been sites of marginalization for Black people due to historical violence and cultural erasure. Yet, Finney also highlights empirical examples of Black engagement with nature, particularly within marooned communities, where Black people reclaimed land as sites of freedom and resistance. In modern times, Finney calls for a cultural shift for Black people to seeking out nature for enjoyment and cultural reconnection as sites of collective regeneration. By focusing on these examples, Finney shows that Black engagement with nature is both an act of resistance and a form of reimagining Black utopia in the present, challenging the racialized boundaries of environmental spaces.

The empirical contributions of Sharpe, Shabazz, and Finney demonstrate that Black utopia is not an abstract or distant ideal, but something actively lived and enacted within the very spaces that have historically been sites of oppression. Through practices of resistance, reclamation, and transformation, Black communities embody their utopian visions in the present, often in ways that challenge the conventional dichotomy of *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*. This understanding of Black utopia lays the groundwork for the next section, where I propose reconceptualizing antiutopianism by emphasizing the agency of individuals in creating social change within existing conditions.

Reconceptualizing Antiutopianism

The tension between *Black utopia* and the *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* dichotomy is a challenge when attempting to reconcile idealized futures with lived realities. This section seeks to resolve this tension by reconceptualizing antiutopia in a way that emphasizes the agency of individuals to create social change within existing conditions. By focusing on the ways individuals are

motivated through mental contrasting, I aim to better understand how utopian thought realizes across different groups.

At its core, utopianism is motivational. It is motivational in the sense that one's concept of utopia serves as the object to stimulate behavior. Psychologically, objects foster motivation when they direct and sustain behavior (Grison & Gazzaniga, 2019a). In this sense, an individual's utopia is merely a layperson's ideal type of society. Cognitive psychologists call this a cognitive *prototype* and it essentially forms the foundation for conceptualizing the world and all its components (Goldstein, 2019, p. 268).[7] Engaging with utopia, or, rather, participating in *utopian thinking*, then, is **mentally contrasting** that representation to one's reality. In non-utopian terms, utopian thinking is simply *normative views of society*. Political scientists might recognize this as an ideal type, but it is more than just a tool for analytical clarity; it is the lens through which the observer views the world. For instance, when I see a tree, I automatically compare it to my *prototype* of a tree, which determines whether I will accept my observation as a "tree" or as something else; it will determine how much attention I give it, whether I scrutinize it; or even whether I ignore it entirely.

Since mental contrasting incorporates the difference between normative views of society, when applied to politics and social change, mental contrasting leads to the three functions of utopia: critique, change, and compensation (escape). Critique arises when there are perceived injustices; change when there is a perceived ability to close the gap and compensation when there is not. This framework provides an alternative way to view the relationship between desires for an alternative way of being (utopia) and the functions of utopia.

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[7] "According to the prototype approach to categorization, membership in a category is determined by comparing the object to a prototype that represents that category. A prototype is a 'typical' member of the category…Thus, the prototype is not an actual member of the category but is an 'average' representation of the category."

If utopian thinking emerges from the discrepancy between one's prototype and experience, then this provides a psychological basis for the way dreams and nightmares function within utopian thought. As Sargent noted (1994), both idealized visions and dystopian fears act as powerful motivators for social change. Dreams of a better world encourage radical change, while nightmares of oppression or societal collapse drive resistance and defense of the status quo (Sargent, 2010).

However, utopian thinking is not always explicit or idealized in the way people may think utopians act. In fact, ordinary people frequently engage with utopian concepts in implicit terms, working through their lived experiences and societal realities without necessarily articulating a clear vision of a perfect world. This nonexplicit engagement highlights the role of the individual in shaping change, as even small actions can have far-reaching effects. Scholars such as Melissa Lane (2012) emphasize that individuals can make a difference regardless of the scale of their efforts, and it is well-known that change is *always* possible (Nicholson, 1998). To presume to know what is impossible is simultaneously to claim to know what is possible, which is itself impossible (Brincat, 581, p. 600; Gabay, 2022, p. 6). In this context, utopian thinking serves as a powerful motivator, encouraging people to act against oppressive systems and strive for better futures.

The kind of ordinary, everyday engagement with such possibilities through mental contrasting I term *Quotidian Utopia* – the kind of utopian engagement that emerges from the recognition of gaps between ideals and reality in day-to-day life. People do not need to live in distant, imagined futures to engage with utopia; the ycan embody utopian principles through their actions and decisions in the present. This is also consistent with known scholarship on intentional communtiies – when dissatisfied people break away from mainstream society to create their own ways of living (Adamik, 2020; Bouvard, 1975, 1975; Ghodsee, 2023; Kanter, 1972; Metcalf, 2004; G. Miller & Hammond, 1994; T. Miller, 1999, 2010; Sargent, 1994, 2010; Zarate, 2024a, 2024b). This

concept expands the understanding of utopia beyond abstracted visions and emphasizes how people, at an individual level, negotiate and navigate their lived experiences with an eye toward transformation – whether big or small.

In this way, antiutopianism must be reconsidered not as the simple negation of utopianism but as a question of agency: who possesses it, how it is exercised, and what its absence or presence signifies in different contexts. I will argue that antiutopian narratives hinge on whether individuals or collectives are perceived as capable of enacting change. The presence of agency determines whether such narratives depict resistance and possibility or resignation and despair..

However, the distribution of agency is not uniform across social imaginaries. Within dominant Western discourse, agency is often assumed for White subjects—its loss, rather than its assertion, becomes the central fear. This explains why dystopian narratives such as *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) and *Uglies* (Westerfeld, 2005) center on protagonists reclaiming lost agency, whereas narratives where agency is absent, such as *The Road* (2016) or *Civil War* (2024), depict protagonists who struggle in vain against inevitable collapse. In these cases, antiutopia serves as a warning: it dramatizes a world where people have lost control—whether to authoritarianism, ecological collapse, or demographic shifts. Fear of losing agency, rather than the struggle to gain it, underpins these narratives.

By contrast, Black utopianism presumes that agency is not given but must be seized and enacted, often in defiance of structural forces designed to suppress it. Unlike White antiutopian narratives, which mourn the loss of a once-possessed agency, Black utopian thought arises from the necessity of asserting agency in a world that has historically denied it. This is why Black utopianism is frequently tied to practices of everyday resistance and meaning-making. It does not anticipate an eventual loss of control but insists on carving out spaces for autonomy and self-

determination within existing constraints. However, this is not to say that White utopia is Black dystopia or vice versa. Rather, the concept of antiutopia helps capture a key distinction: while White antiutopia revolves around the fear of losing agency, Black utopia centers on the exercise of agency to create alternative ways of being. In this sense, antiutopia can be understood as dystopia that lacks agency.

This distinction has significant implications for understanding antiutopia. By integrating insights from both White antiutopia and Black utopianism, agency—its presence, loss, or assertion—is the central concern. Reconceptualizing antiutopia in this way moves it beyond a cultural descriptor and turns it into a framework for analyzing the conditions under which agency is enacted or foreclosed. Under this reconceptualization, for both Black and White subjects, antiutopia signals the fear of losing agency; for Black subjects, however, this is nothing new. Still, this shift offers a more nuanced understanding of utopian and antiutopian thinking across different social contexts, reinforcing the idea that what is dystopian for some may be the necessary precondition for utopia for others.

By Way of a Conclusion

This paper has argued for a reconceptualization of antiutopianism that centers agency, challenging the dominant elsewhere & elsewhen dichotomy that often frames utopian thought. Rather than treating antiutopia as merely the negation of utopia, I have positioned it as a reflection of how agency is perceived, lost, or asserted within different social contexts. Understanding utopia as a cognitive process—where individuals mentally contrast their lived realities against idealized possibilities—reveals that utopian thinking is not just about grand, speculative futures but is deeply embedded in everyday life. Whether through critique, change, or compensation, the drive toward

utopia manifests in ways both explicit and implicit, shaping how individuals and communities respond to the conditions they inhabit.

This perspective allows for a more expansive understanding of utopia as something not merely imagined but enacted. What I have termed Quotidian Utopia captures the ways in which utopian engagement emerges through small, everyday acts of resistance, adaptation, and meaning-making. From intentional communities to grassroots activism, people continuously negotiate the space between ideal and reality, demonstrating that utopia is not confined to speculative visions but is part of lived experience. These acts, however minor they may seem, illustrate that utopian thinking does not require distant futures; it materializes in the present through efforts—big or small—to create alternative ways of being.

At the heart of this analysis is the role of agency in defining antiutopianism. For White antiutopian narratives, the primary fear is the loss of agency, reflecting anxieties over diminished control, be it through authoritarianism, ecological collapse, or demographic change. In contrast, Black utopianism operates under the assumption that agency must be actively seized and asserted against structural barriers designed to suppress it. This distinction is not about opposition but about different relationships to power: White antiutopia warns of an impending loss, while Black utopia insists on the necessity of claiming what has long been denied. This framing provides a richer, more dynamic way of understanding how utopian and antiutopian thinking function across different social imaginaries.

That said, this framework is not without its limitations. The categorization of White and Black utopian thought, while useful for analysis, risks flattening the diversity of experiences within these groups. Intersectional factors such as class, gender, and geopolitical location complicate the relationship between agency and utopian thought, requiring further exploration. Additionally,

while this paper engages primarily with literary and historical narratives, empirical research on how individuals and communities actively engage in utopian or antiutopian thinking in practice would deepen our understanding. Finally, while mental contrasting provides a compelling psychological foundation for understanding utopian motivation, further interdisciplinary research is needed to connect cognitive processes with collective political action.

Future research should expand on these insights by exploring how non-Western and Indigenous traditions conceptualize utopia and antiutopia, offering alternative frameworks for understanding agency beyond Western paradigms. Case studies on contemporary social movements and community-building initiatives could further illuminate how Quotidian Utopia operates in practice. Moreover, examining how other marginalized groups—such as Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and diasporic communities—experience antiutopia could reveal similar or divergent patterns of agency and constraint. Lastly, these insights have practical applications: an agency-centered understanding of utopianism could inform social movement strategies, policy-making, and activist praxis, providing a roadmap for transformative change.

Ultimately, reconceptualizing antiutopia in terms of agency allows us to move beyond its conventional use as a descriptor of cultural pessimism. Instead, it becomes a framework for understanding the conditions under which agency is enacted, constrained, or lost. Utopian and antiutopian thought are not merely theoretical constructs but are embedded in lived struggles for power, autonomy, and self-determination. As this paper has argued, what is dystopian for some may be the necessary precondition for utopia for others. By centering agency in our understanding of antiutopianism, I hope to open new possibilities for interpreting and engaging with the forces that shape our collective futures.

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