UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOCIAL COLLAPSE THROUGH SCIENCE FICTION

Wednesday, March 9, 2022
Live Via Zoom

5 PM: Ahmanson Lab presentation
6 PM: California Dystopia panel
KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Los Angeles Times columnist Carolina A. Miranda will moderate a panel about understanding climate change and social collapse through science fiction, with speakers including climate resiliency expert John Bwarie, Octavia Butler scholar Ayana A. H. Jamieson, science fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson, and climate scientist Daniel Swain.

Prior to the discussion, digital artist Erik Loyer of Opertoon and a team of students from the Ahmanson Lab at the USC Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study will share an immersive digital work, accompanied by an exhibition of rare and unique materials from the USC Libraries.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

John Bwarie is the founder and CEO of Stratiscope, which helps businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies engage communities to better serve and do business in them. Bwarie founded and directs the Community Brand Accelerator, an academy for changemakers seeking to expand their influence and build communities.

Ayana A. H. Jamieson is the founder of the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network. Her work centers around the intersections of critical depth psychology, race, culture, and mythology. Jamieson is an interdisciplinary scholar whose dissertation explores Butler’s biographical origins and the mythic aspects of her literary work.

Carolina A. Miranda (moderator) covers art, architecture, urban design, and other facets of culture for the L.A. Times. Her work often looks at how the arts intersect with politics, gender, and race. She is a regular contributor to KCRW’s Press Play and was a winner of the 2017 Rabkin Prize in Visual Arts Journalism.

Kim Stanley Robinson is one of the foremost living writers of science fiction and a proud advocate of science fiction as a genre. He is the author of 22 novels, including The Ministry for the Future and the books in the Three Californias trilogy and the Mars trilogy. His memoir, The High Sierra: A Love Story, will be out later this year.

Daniel Swain is a climate scientist within UCLA’s Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, a research fellow in the Capacity Center for Climate and Weather Extremes at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, and the California Climate Fellow at The Nature Conservancy. His recent work seeks to understand the changing spatiotemporal character of precipitation, including the rising risk of droughts and “megaﬁoods” in a warming climate.
OCTAVIA BUTLER’S PARABLE SERIES

Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006) was a renowned science fiction writer whose work has had and continues to have an enduring impact. Exploring themes of social justice, climate change, and dystopia, her work is deeply beloved and even seen as a guide, especially by those creating and organizing in Black feminist and Afrofuturist traditions.

Indeed, Butler’s 1998 novel *Parable of the Talents* includes an authoritarian president who uses the slogan “Make America Great Again.” *Parable of the Talents* is the second of two novels in the Parable series. The first, *Parable of the Sower*, was published in 1993 and is set in a dystopic Los Angeles of the 2020s. The series envisions intertwined social, political, and environmental crises. Among Butler’s many other books are *Kindred*, the Patternist series, *Bloodchild*, and *Lilith’s Brood*.

Butler was born in Pasadena and educated at Pasadena City College, Cal State L.A., and UCLA. She wrote more than a dozen books and was honored with the Nebula Award, a MacArthur “Genius” Grant, and a PEN West award for lifetime achievement.

SOME OTHER CALIFORNIA DYSTOPIC OR POST-APOCALYPTIC NOVELS

- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick
- *Always Coming Home* by Ursula K. Le Guin
- *Virtual Light* by William Gibson
- *Three Californias* trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *All the Birds in the Sky* by Charlie Jane Anders
- *California* by Edan Lepucki

VOCABULARY CORNER

- **biomimicry**—the emulation of the models, systems, and elements of nature
- **biomythography**—a literary form that weaves together myth, history, and biography; the term was coined by the Black lesbian feminist poet, writer, and visionary Audre Lorde in the title of her 1982 book *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*—*A Biomythography*
- **climate justice**—an approach to addressing climate change that takes into account human rights and social impacts, recognizing that climate change disproportionately impacts people already affected by social and economic injustice, including Indigenous people and communities of color
- **geoengineering**—the deliberate manipulation, by humans, of an environmental process in order to counteract a harmful effect of climate change; for example, cloud seeding, which attempts to bring rain to dry farmland, or to weaken tropical storms by putting particles of certain chemicals into clouds
CLIMATE CHANGE INFORMATION

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – ipcc.ch
California’s Climate Change Assessment – climateassessment.ca.gov

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do fictional depictions of California’s future inform, encourage, or hinder efforts to build a better future?
- What do you want from fiction in this time?
- How are social, political, and environmental challenges interrelated?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network
  - octaviabutlerlegacy.com
- The Octavia E. Butler Collection at The Huntington
  - huntington.org
- Sunrise Movement
  - sunrisemovement.org
- California Environmental Justice Alliance
  - caleja.org
- Communities for a Better Environment
  - cbecal.org
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
  - eycej.org
- Campus groups and initiatives
  - Arts and Climate Collective
    - https://www.annenberglab.com/projects/acc/
  - Environmental Student Assembly
    - https://green.usc.edu/students/student-organization/
  - USC Sustainability
    - https://green.usc.edu
  - Sustainability-oriented student groups at USC
    - https://green.usc.edu/students/student-organization/
- Upcoming Visions and Voices event:
  - 4/22 All the Truths We Cannot See: A Chernobyl Story

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Hannah Schilperoort of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

Octavia E. Butler and Conseula Francis, Conversations with Octavia Butler (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010).


**ARTICLE**


**COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS**

New Exhibit Explores California Dystopia Through Books, Art Octavia E. Butler Papers

**DATABASES**

ProQuest

Project MUSE

**RADIO/PODCASTS**

NPR Morning Edition: Sci-Fi Writer Octavia Butler Offered Warnings And Hope In Her Work

Podcast: Octavia’s Parables Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network