Hostile Geographies

Black Girls Fight to Save Themselves and the World

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Abstract: In this article, I engage in a parallel reading of the consumption of Black girlhood in speculative fiction in the television series *The Passage*, and the film *The Girl with All the Gifts*, and in the classroom. In these texts are non-consensual attempts to harvest biological materials from Black girls, exhibiting the belief that Black bodies are utilitarian, at best, and meant for consumption. Like these narratives, the classroom consumes Black girls physically along with their futures. I explore how Black girl resistance disrupts such consumption and interrogate texts in which Black girls create narratives for themselves. In these narratives, so-called disposable Black girls map out new cartographies of narrative resistance and new liberatory geographies for their future.

Keywords: Blackness, classroom, education, film, horror, race, speculative fiction

Introduction

> When I dream of Afrofutures, I see Black girls who aren't forced to minimize their genius … I see school spaces that protect them, and I see Black girls using their creativity to set the record straight in a crooked system. (Toliver, quoted in Strain 2021: para. 8)

I deeply appreciate these words of Black girlhood scholar Stephanie Toliver because I, too, dream of Black girl futures that are not consumed but given space and place to manifest even, especially, if it means disrupting the educational system. This article is about two cinematic Black girls—Amy and Melanie. In the geographies of education, the classroom is seen as true north. What takes place within those walls is the learning of not only the requisite subjects but also of institutions and one's eventual complicity in oppression or the acceptance of one's own oppression (Illich 1971). For this article, I address two research questions:

> How does the consumption and bodily positioning of Black girls in speculative film exemplify their experiences in the conventional classroom?

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> How does speculative fiction enable other types of Black girl resistance during which they are able to disrupt the systems and institutions in which they encounter symbolic and physical violence?

The premise of this article is an exploration of consumption of Black girls' bodies and futures. In *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*, Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen (1992) explain, "The politics of consumption must be understood as something more than what to buy, or even what to boycott. Consumption is a social relationship, the dominant relationship in our society." It is about power with "immense social and political implications" (51). Power is at the root of the relationships explored through these media, as well as the experience of Black girls in the classroom.

Culture is passed down from generation to generation as Gobbo (2014) reminds us, and this process is the creation of the future. Power allows the othering of Blackness by creating a form of representation that dictates how a people sees itself. That othering is one of the primary tenets of colonialism—the destruction of culture (Fanon 2004; Hall 1990; hooks 1992; Said 1978). In "Black Looks: Race and Representation," bell hooks (1992) explains how Black woman as other connects to the desire of the Black female body within sexual desire and pleasure. Although the Black girls discussed in these media are not thought of as sexual objects, I use hooks's analysis, in the context of this article, that power is a form of pleasure. This power manifests itself in the form of consumption.

I teach a course, called Viewing Black Girlhood, known as VBG, that explores Black girls as protagonists in film, television, and social media. I created the course in response to the popularity of #BlackGirlMagic (Rebel Girls 2021), the consumption of Black girl/woman/femme culture and style, and the growing number of Black girlhood narratives to affirm the need to view Black girlhood not only critically but also as intrinsically woven into US history.

As a filmmaker, I strive to educate my cast and crew on the content on which we are collaborating. In the summer of 2019, I wrote and directed a short film, *#BlackGirlhood*, for which I supplied my cast and crew with excerpts from Monique Morris's (2016) *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* and Rebecca Epstein and colleagues' (2017) "Girl Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood." It was important to me that every person of more than 35 cast and crew members, knew where the story was birthed and understood the challenges Black girls face in schools, from the attack on natural hairstyles ("Update" 2013) to the

sexual-abuse-to-prison pipeline (Saada Saar et al. 2017). I make conscious decisions about representation and about troubling that representation. It is not enough to be visible; we need to challenge the tropes of both Blackness and woman/girlhood and add to the analysis on Black girls in informal and formal educational spaces in cinema. I wrote this article so that we can see Black girls resist, trouble systems, and build their own futures. Octavia Butler says it plainly, "What we don't see, we assume can't be" (quoted in Russell 2017: para. 3). Black girls need to see themselves in worlds that have refused them and see that there are ways that challenge a world hell-bent on erasing them; this matters because Black girls matter.

In this article, I discuss two girls in two narratives that focus on the consumption of Black girls' bodies through violence to Black girls' genetic materials, and Black girls' futures. Each section explores how cinematic Black girls complicate the landscape of the frame by taking up space and resisting both power and racial filmic tropes. I compare the television series *The Passage* and the film *The Girl with All the Gifts* (hereafter *Gifts*).

Method

Speculative cinema is the focus of this article because the representation of Black girls is limited in this genre, whereas there are more examples in literature. The pilot episode of *The Passage* is the first viewing in my VBG course. The episode challenges the white Savior trope and shows how Blackness could inform speculative narratives that are traditionally centered on whiteness. *Gifts* is always the last film screened. It embraces what we rarely get to see—the Black Final Girl. The film centers a Black girl who refuses to perform labor that leads to her own sacrifice in order to secure the survival of the future for whiteness; instead, she *is* the future.

Consumed for Sacrifice: Amy Saves Herself First

The Passage is a horror television series that was broadcast on the Fox network for one season in 2019. Created by Liz Heldens, the series is based loosely on Justin Cronin's (2014) *The Passage* in which an avian flu outbreak threatens to overtake humanity. A secret military facility, Project Noah, experiments with the unknown, including a creature from the caves of Bolivia, presumably the answer to saving humankind. Project Noah's

experimentation heads in dark and dangerous directions, creating a hybrid human, a vampire. Federal agents are tasked by hardened lead agent Clark Peters to procure test subjects—death row inmates—for Project Noah. The procurer is Federal Agent Brad Wolgast, who is tasked with bringing in a child, who turns out to be a ten-year-old Black girl named Amy Bellafonte. It is believed that her youth will advance the project's research to create the cure but, instead, Amy develops powers the vampires realize can aid in their intentions—a worldwide apocalypse.

In the pilot episode, Amy is kidnapped from a foster home after the death of her mother from a drug overdose. As the agents arrive, Amy is fighting another girl to reclaim her copy of Madeleine L'Engle's 1962 Young Adult speculative fiction novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. Amy's foster mother is indifferent to the fighting, breaking the two girls apart only when the agents arrive. She agrees to send Amy with the agents with no questions asked, save one: Who will reimburse her for housing? Amy is entrenched in the foster care system. It is a system that routinely fails Black children (Beniwal 2017).

When the agents claim that Amy is going to be taken to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), she asks, "How come there's no social worker? How come they didn't send a lady? They always send a lady." Amy's lived experiences and hardships have helped her navigate the foster care system. Geographies dictate the knowledge individuals obtain. This is experiential learning and it serves Amy well when she realizes that she is more knowledgeable on procedure than the agents. Armed with this knowledge, she attempts to evade the agents and almost loses them as they pursue her.

Moments later, Agent Walgast physically reprimands his subordinate, Agent Doyle, for hitting Amy upon capturing her. Walgast realizes that he must get Amy away from Doyle, who is indifferent to Amy's fate at Project Noah. Walgast plans a detour to a roadside carnival, to Doyle's annoyance, exclaiming, "She's cargo!" For Doyle, Amy is a means to an end, a mission to be completed for a scientific experiment. He does not care about the details or about Amy's wellbeing. Twenty minutes into the pilot episode, Amy is already being dehumanized and this plays a role in her lost innocence in adultifying her, allowing her to be seen as strong enough to manage the consumption of her body (see Dumas and Nelson 2016; Epstein et al. 2017) that awaits her at Project Noah. How will she survive?

In horror films, the character who is known as the Final Girl, who has always been white, is the one who survives the horrible night of carnage

committed by the monstrous villain. She watches as her friends succumb, one by one, to torture and death. She destroys the villain ultimately more by a stroke of luck than by design. It is through her eyes that the narrative unfolds; she is our hero (Clover 1992). Unlike the original Final Girl, the rare Black Final Girl has traditionally contended with institutional racism and knows that the systems of inequity are not truly destroyed, and thereby vows to continue the fight. This Final Black Girl, then, becomes the Enduring Woman (or, in this case, Girl). She now fights not only for herself since the trope almost always means that she fights on behalf of men in her story (Burgin 2019; Coleman 2011).

The opening scene of the pilot episode begins with the introduction of Amy; we hear her telling us, ostensibly in her own words, who she is and where this narrative begins. She is the hero of this tale. "My name is Amy Bellafonte. I didn't used to believe in monsters, but I do now."

Later in the episode, the lead Black female scientist in Project Noah asks Agent Peters, "Can you find a child?" He replies, "I can do it. It's a matter of finding a kid with no family. No paper trail with social services. Someone no one will miss." Cut to 10-year-old Amy: she is the answer to the question of who would not be missed. She is in a diner surrounded by a group of boys her own age as she bests one of them at arm wrestling. This visual construction—the framing of this group in which Amy is centered, open to the camera, and surrounded by the boys establishes her both as a formidable opponent in a world of boys (soon to be men) and as a scrappy loner. Day has turned to night, and Amy sits alone in the same diner with her well-weathered copy of *A Wrinkle in Time* in which the protagonist Meg fights to save her father (and the world) from the Dark Thing, becoming the savior of her own story; in the television series, Amy deals with a similar fight since her dark things are vampires that threaten an apocalypse.

We never see Amy in the classroom. Her education comes from her experience with systems and institutions. She is taught the tools of survival by the very person who kidnaps her for Project Noah, Agent Wolgast, or as Amy calls him, The Agent. While confined to Project Noah, The Agent teaches Amy how to gather tactical knowledge for escaping and evading capture. Even so, The Agent is another white man who exists in a militaristic space, one that is traditionally white, male, and violent. The Agent drives the narrative toward the white savior trope by centering "a white messianic character" (Hughey 2014: 1) who saves and elevates the downtrodden person of color from low status and teaches them how to navigate the white world. It is the centering of whiteness, the paternalistic whitewashing of

history. From as early as enslavement, Blackness was treated as if it needed the paternalistic "protection and direction" (Genovese 1974: 5) of whiteness saving Blackness from itself. Wolgast is the white savior of the narrative who sweeps in to save the endangered Black child, who is "special" and "wicked smart," as Wolgast compliments Amy. Although this trope is usually mentioned cinematically, especially in the cinematic classroom (think Michelle Pfeiffer (1995) in *Dangerous Minds*), it also exists in the actual classroom (Henry 2020; Hughey 2014).

Once at Project Noah, Amy is monitored, and the researchers attempt to draw her blood without her consent. They use power and the threat of violence to consume her body for experimentation. She acquiesces only when her request for The Agent to be present is granted. Once alone, Amy informs The Agent of the security door code, how many steps it took her to get to the room, and gives him other pertinent information. Amy is not waiting to be saved.

In the fifth episode of *The Passage*, Wolgast, in conversation with Anthony, a Black male test subject, promises to save Amy from the military's plan to turn her into a weapon. Anthony reveals what the audience has begun to deduce through observing Amy's determination and developing powers while Amy and Wolgast win battle after battle, mostly because of Amy. He says, "There is no saving her. Your chance to save her was back at that foster home. See, the game has changed, bruh. Nothing's going down the way you think it will. It's Amy that's the savior".

By the last episode of the series, Amy indeed is the savior when she saves The Agent's life. Attacked and bitten by an infected vampire, he has only a few moments before turning into one. Friends of the Agent and Amy try to pull her away from The Agent to kill him before he turns. However, Amy kills them instead, ripping out their throats. She then saves The Agent's life by administering one of the only experimental cures available in the world, and then she leaves.

As the story concludes, Amy speaks again in her own voice, bookending her story arc from her introduction in the first episode to the last one. She says,

> I don't regret what I did. I can live with my choice. The CDC wasn't coming. Whose life was more important than yours? No one's. I only regret running away. I thought you would look at me and see a monster. I should have thanked you at least. You taught me everything, Agent. You taught me what it meant to have a family. Taught me how to take care of myself. How to pay attention. How to be ready.

Is this not what we want for our Black girls? Do we not want them to be lifted up and taught the skills they need to survive and be ready for the world? But even in this moment, when Amy is the Black Final Girl, there is still the need to center whiteness. She sees herself as second to The Agent even though she is the one with the power to save the world. We have created a world in which, even when confronted with their own consumption, Black girls are still expected to sacrifice their bodies and futures for whiteness.

She Consumes: Melanie *Is* Black Girl Futures

Gifts is a 2016 UK feature film directed by Colm McCarthy and based on Mike Carey's novel of the same name; he also wrote the screenplay. In the film, the cinematic Black girl is Melanie. Humanity is barely hanging on after a fungus has infected the world. Hungries, or zombies, make up most of the population and roam the world mindlessly looking to feed. A scientist, Dr. Caroline Caldwell, acquires child hungries and houses them at a remote military base where she uses them as test subjects in her search for a cure. The few interactions the child hungries have with other people are limited to the military, led by Sergeant Eddie Parks, and their teacher, Miss Helen Justineau. She is the only one who sees the child hungries as children; to everyone else, they merely mimic humans. The base is overrun, and the four main characters, along with two other soldiers, make a narrow escape. They travel through the English countryside filled with hungries in the hope of making it to London to find other survivors.

Each day Melanie is transported from her cell at the military base to the classroom strapped down to a wheelchair, with her hands, feet, and head all restrained. She knows no other world save those two spaces and the hallway she traverses to arrive at each. Her guards are military personnel who keep their guns trained on her when she is unrestrained. The constant threat of violence is a norm for Melanie, no matter how curious or eager she is to engage with Justineau in the classroom. Melanie asks question after question in trying to understand deeply and writes short stories that express her love for Justineau, who is the only person who treats her decently. Parks observes Justineau cross the line as she affectionately places her hand gently on Melanie's head. He storms into the classroom and exhibits the belief that there is no humanity in Melanie or any of the child hungries by provoking their desire to feed, causing a frenzy in the room as they all try to rip themselves

from their wheelchairs while his soldiers look on with their weapons drawn. This is again power with the threat of violence.

It is nothing new to see Black girls on the receiving end of violence from the police state. School resource officers (SROs) are active law enforcement and therefore part of an institution that the FBI Counterterrorism Division (2006) has said is rife with white supremacy and toxic masculinity. When interacting with women, especially Black women, police lash out more aggressively than normal (Carbado and Richardson 2018). Neither trained to be in schools nor work with youth, SROs are given physical power over students and have been more instigators of violence than peacemakers, or as Sue Rahr and Stephen Rice (2015) put it, more "urban warrior[s]" than "community guardian[s]" (2). The classroom is traditionally unkind to Black girls, although research on the history of police brutality and Black girls has been scarce (Malone Gonzalez 2020). Black girls are suspended at higher rates than their white counterparts, and the school-to-prison pipeline is real (Epstein et al. 2017).

These urban warriors consume Black bodies through violence no child should encounter. In October 2016 at Spring Valley High School in South Carolina, a Black teenage girl (her identity was never disclosed) was violently thrown across the room by a white male SRO. Niya Kenny was among the girl's classmates. Whereas it was reported that Kenny filmed the encounter, she informed me via email that another classmate, a Black male teenager named Tony Robinson Jr., in fact did so. Kenny said she "was only protesting [her classmate's attack] and got arrested for that." In a phone conversation with Robinson, he explained that "students were shocked and afraid. No one [referring to the Black teacher and administrators in the room who stood by and watched] was helping her except for Niya." The staff maintained what Ranita Ray has called a "hostile space for Black girls … that perpetuate[s] harm" (2021: 8). The zero-tolerance policy in schools has created a punitive environment in which administrators believe that small infractions will lead to larger and more disruptive behavioral incidents (Morris 2016). Kenny suggested that the same administrators who "stood around and watched" were making a clear statement of us (the administration) versus them (the students), a statement, as Solomon and Rankin (2019) note, that suggests that any dissension would be a weakness on the administration's part. Holding on to power that is rooted in "internalize[d] colonial and white supremacist ideologies" (Ray 2021: 8) was more important than saving a Black girl from the physical consumption of her body through violence.

In this film and television series, there is not only figurative consumption through violence but also the literal harvesting of biological material from Black girls. The harvesting harkens back to the history of medical racism that Black and Brown folks have experienced from enslavement to immigration detention centers. The Black body, especially those of Black girls and women, is "territorialized—publicly and financially claimed, owned, and controlled by an outsider" (McKittrick 2006: 44).

This territorialization ranges from J. Marion Sims's experiments on enslaved Black women during the nineteenth century to establish the field of modern gynecology to the nonconsensual harvesting of Henrietta Lacks's cancer cells in 1951. These "HeLa cells" are the basis of a significant number of medical advances, including the development of the polio vaccine and other financially fruitful developments, as well as Pulitzer Prize-winning research. In these scientific narratives are Black girls whose genetic materials are claimed by institutions rooted in white supremacy, whose bodies are claimed to serve the world at large—the white world.

It is important to note that in the novel *Gifts*, Melanie "has skin like a princess in a fairy tale; skin as white as snow" (Carey 2014: 8). In the film, however, Melanie is portrayed by Sennia Nanua, a brown-skinned Black girl. The teacher, Miss Justineau, is described in the book as having skin that is "such a wonderful, wonderful colour. It's dark brown, like the wood of the trees in Melanie's rainforest … or like the coffee that Miss Justineau pours" (17–18), "*skin so dark she was like her own shadow*" (23, emphasis in the original). Students in my VBG course commonly ask how the analysis of these two girls, Amy and Melanie, would change if they were white, as written in the novels. There is a nuance and complexity that could not exist when Sergeant Parks calls Melanie a "freakin' abortion … an aberration" (McCarthy 2016), if she were white. The level of dehumanization would be infinitesimal since the history of dehumanization in US history is based on racism and violence (Goff et al. 2014) and is especially troubling when medical racism is not a thing of the past. There are still claims that Black bodies have a higher pain tolerance. Dehumanization of enslaved Africans made it possible for them to become property, a commodity not seen as human. Once Melanie and the others leave the military base, she is placed in a face mask that keeps her from attacking anyone. This is, surely, a callback to the iron bit or muzzle used on the enslaved who were unruly or to keep them from eating. This history makes Melanie's situation more complex and troubling.

Colm McCarthy, the director of *Gifts*, stated that Nanua was cast because she was the best to audition. However, speculative fiction author

Tananarive Due sums it up well in saying, "It creates such a difference for the film to have this Black child … This is a sharper social commentary than even [novelist Mike Carey] had intended" (Burgin 2019).

Beyond discrimination, dehumanization makes it possible for the Sacrificial Negro to exist. The Sacrificial Negros are the Black characters who, in order to ensure the white protagonist's survival, sacrifice themselves (Coleman 2011). They willingly distract the killer, jump into the depths of the unknown, or stay behind to give the white protagonist a fighting chance at escape. They commit this sacrifice so the white male adventurer and last hope of saving the world survives. The power and determination of that sacrifice transfers to the hero, strengthening his resolve (Thomas 2019).

In *Gift*, Caldwell is trying one last time to convince Melanie that harvesting her genetic material, essentially dissecting her, will save humankind. Caldwell reluctantly admits that Melanie and the other child hungries are indeed alive and more than test subjects in her experiments but that it is still necessary. Melanie asks, "Then, why should it be us who die for you?" She does what few Black characters have ever done in speculative film: she asserts that her life, her Black body, is more than deserving of survival. Melanie then makes a choice. It is not only that she will not die for mankind but also that she will live for herself and for the other child hungries. She is the future. After Melanie sets a fungal tree on fire releasing seeds that will sow a new world, Sergeant Parks appears in search of her.

Melanie: You should have stayed inside, in the lab.

Parks: I was looking for you.

Melanie: Is Miss Justineau with you?

Parks: She's back there.

Melanie: With the airlock closed?

Parks: Yeah. Melanie, what is this?

Melanie: It's seeds, the seeds that make people into hungries.

Parks: Jesus fucking Christ.

Melanie: I'm sorry, Sergeant. I'm so sorry.

Parks: What did you do?

Melanie: I made the pods open.

Parks: Oh, Jesus Christ.

Melanie: It's going to be all right.

Parks: No. It's over. It's all over.

Melanie: It's not over. It's just not yours anymore. But I thought you'd be safe. I made sure you'd be safe. I closed the airlock.

> Parks: Melanie, Melanie, I don't want to end up like them. [pulls his gun out of his holster] Please. Please! [Melanie takes the gun and cocks it.] Where did you learn that?
>
> Melanie: I watched you.
>
> Parks: Of course, you did.

Melanie then shoots Parks. She spares him living as one of the hungries. She is willing to save him even when whiteness and authoritative power treated her as less than human because she has been conditioned to love, respect, and fear whiteness. To watch a Black girl standing over a dying white man in a future she manifests is not only surprising but also antithetical to the rising tide of white supremacy that was taking hold of the United States during the film's theatrical run (Burgin 2019) and at this current moment in US culture and politics. There is liberation in this composition that gives Melanie power over Parks as she stands over him. It is what is at the core of horror—white fear of Blackness (Coleman 2011). Who, then, is speculative fiction for?

Speculative fiction, regardless of genre and medium, often places fans of color in a double bind. There is a desire to see oneself in these complex and unique worlds while juxtaposed against regular disappointment that when there is representation, it is filled with dark tropes, stereotypes, and limited character development, if any. In *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, Ebony Thomas (2019) explains where fans of color sit in speculative fiction; she writes,

> To watch a science fiction film is to learn that you have no future—there are only two or three people of color on most spaceships. Very often, when you appear on the page or on the screen, you are a slave, a servant, or a prostitute—your body is not your own. If you have words, your speech serves only to support the narrative, never to subvert it. (23–24)

When we are introduced to Melanie her body is indeed not her own. *Gifts* is special because it is a speculative narrative told from her perspective. Like Amy in *The Passage*, Melanie uses the knowledge she obtains through experiential learning. She observes her world, asks questions, and when she encounters new information, she learns when and where that information should be used. Melanie comes into who she is through her experiences outside the walls of her cell and classroom. Her character arc is ultimately about her understanding of power and its shift from the military state—Caldwell, Justineau, and Parks—to herself. Inside the walls of the compound, Melanie is no more than a test subject who will eventually be dissected like so many other child hungries. Once she is in the world beyond

the walls roaming the countryside, Melanie is no longer a sure subject for Caldwell. The group members find themselves in a town inundated with hungries, and it becomes clear that Melanie is the only one able to venture out to find supplies while the rest of them hide. On her reconnaissance mission, she finds a group of feral child hungries. As Melanie's group ventures into the city market, the child hungries corner them to feed, but Melanie asserts her power telling Justineau, and Parks, "Don't look at them. Look at me," to show her dominance after killing the leader of the child hungries. She has become the leader of the feral child hungries, and the power within her own group has shifted. This shift in positionality makes her refusal to be the Sacrificial Negro possible.

Returning to Niya Kenny's comment of "only protesting" as the reason she was arrested, that statement becomes recognizable as the beginnings of Kenny's finding her voice. It was not until that day in the classroom that she claimed the title and began doing the work of an activist, finding her power only after it was pointed out to her. Her own positionality in the world changed when she used her voice and her freedom to stand up for another Black girl. This work in the classroom moves Black girls beyond the geography of the classroom to more expansive spaces. Kenny's activism is her resistance, her future, and the future of Black girls. Black girls are not blindly sacrificing themselves to save a world that has historically rendered them invisible or disposable and continues to do so; saving the world is merely coincidental. When Black girls win, everybody wins.

Black girls are showing up and showing out. Activism and protests calling for the removal of SROs from schools led some Black girls into the streets in the summer of 2020, directly following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer (Leone 2020). Black girls have been a pivotal group in spreading activism and claiming spaces in order to advocate for themselves and for all Black people. Not only did they join Black Lives Matter protests, but in fact, Black girls organized and led many of those protests (Bennett 2020). Using social media, Black girls as young as 15, the same demographic that is systemically silenced in the classroom, began to find their voices. Because the mediated narrative, or the news in various mediums, villainizes Black girls and thereby works to justify their abuse, Black girls have resisted being made villains in their own stories through content creation and critical media literacy—practices that disrupt the dominant narrative (McArthur 2016). These platforms are spaces in which community is established and the voices of Black girls amplified. Resistance on social media platforms includes hair tutorials by Black girls, important

resources in a world where Black hair is cut by teachers in the classroom or where Black hair can lead to expulsion. Social media, specifically Twitter, is where the founders of Black Lives Matter first launched the movement.

Lauren Kelly's (2018) study of Black girls and their Snapchat usage exemplifies the experiences of Black girls and the construction of their identity, positioned in and outside of schools, and their development of critical media literacy. Kelly outlines how Black girls use Snapchat to inform those outside the classroom of a classmate's white supremacist rhetoric, create community, and find their activist voice rooted in "Black linguistic liberation" (Baker-Bell 2020: i). Whereas Black girls are often silenced in the classroom, social media has afforded them many outlets for their frustrations, as well as participation in the democratization of knowledge. Still, these same girls who are using social platforms to challenge themselves and the world, to nurture their identities and expand their knowledge, are met with punitive measures (Kelly 2018). Who will save Black girls from these policies?

Conclusion

When I show my students the viewing list for VBG, there is always one student who asks a version of this question, "Are we going to watch anything with joy?" Although I screen one or two films that are traditionally considered joyful, I truly believe that *The Passage* and *The Girl with All the Gifts* are as well. Amy and Melanie are two examples of the Black Final Girl, and the fight for Black girl futures is joyful even if the journey there is fraught with the challenges Black girls face in the world beyond the screen. There is no one way to joy, or as bell hooks (1996) says, "There is no one story of black girlhood" (xiii).

Geographies dictate the knowledge one obtains. Amy's and Melanie's journeys exist both in and outside the classroom. Their stories subvert how Black girls are traditionally seen in speculative fiction, if they exist at all. When do Black girls get the opportunity to craft their own counternarratives? Amy and Melanie are Black girls in speculative fiction who will not be consumed, and they dream of their own futures in which they do not see themselves as monsters but as saviors in and of their own narratives.

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