

# DOPE LABS

Transcript of Lab 034: Presently Futuristic

**Zakiya:** Well, Titi is that time of year again.

**Titi:** Our favorite time of year.

**Zakiya:** It's spooky season.

**Titi:** Yes, turtlenecks, scary movies...

**Zakiya:** Apple cider.

**Titi:** Pumpkins. Apple pie. I want it all. I love the fall time. I love spooky season. We've been watching a lot of scary movies.

**Zakiya:** Oh, yes. This year, though, a lot of our spooky content has been centered around Lovecraft Country.

**Titi:** Oh, my goodness. A phenomenal show. If you haven't watched Lovecraft country figure out a way to watch it. It's so well done.

**Zakiya:** And even if you don't like that type of media, just watch it on mute because. Jonathan Majors. What's up?

**Titi:** That's a beautiful man.

**Zakiya:** I just told him to watch the show today. Today they said, "what is going on? I'm so confused." And I was like "That means you're only one minute in".

**Titi:** Exactly, because I remember I started late.

**Zakiya:** Yes.

**Titi:** Zakiya was watching from the day that it dropped. And I was a couple of episodes behind. She was like, you have to watch the show. In the first ten minutes I was like, "what exactly is this?" I was so confused because it was just unlike really anything I'd ever seen before.

**Zakiya:** So this episode we're looking at spooky season in a different light. We're looking at it through the lens of Afro futurism, horror and how has just really changed the perspective of the genre lately.

**Titi:** I'm Titi

**Zakiya:** And I'm Zakiya.

**Titi:** And from Spotify, this is Dope Labs.

**Zakiya:** Let's give people a quick overview about Lovecraft country.

**Titi:** Just an FYI they are spoilers in this episode. So if you haven't finished watching hit pause now, go finish watching, and then come back.

**Zakiya:** The major stars, we mentioned, Jonathan Majors,.

**Titi:** Jurnee Smollett.

**Zakiya:** Who we all grew up with,.

**Titi:** With every project, it feels like she's leveling up with her talent. She's just phenomenal.

**Zakiya:** Aunjanue Ellis.

**Titi:** Wunmi Masaku.

**Zakiya:** And then everybody's favorite, Omar, a.k.a. Michael K. Williams. And so those are like that's our major cast, but we got to give Mischa Green her props. So she developed this from a book by Matt Ruff called Lovecraft Country, which is based on these horror stories by H.P. Lovecraft. This is not just a Titi and Zakiya thing the world is talking about lovecraft country. It's had crazy social media impressions every Sunday night. Get ready. Everybody on Twitter is talking about it. People are posting about it on Instagram. And I listen to Black Girl Watching, which is just about Lovecraft country by Brooke Obi.

**Titi:** By Brooke Obie. Yes,.

**Zakiya:** We know we're big Brooke Obie fans here.

**Titi:** Huge Brooke Obie fans. Hey, Brooke!

**Zakiya:** I think Lovecraft country saw this type of impression in the social media space and just in what we could see for TV and this kind of horror and science fiction and this amazing blend of art. But we also saw it with Watchmen.

**Titi:** And we also saw it with Black Panther.

**Zakiya:** Yes. Get out.

**Titi:** Absolutely. So that's like futurism flash horror, right?

**Zakiya:** This really made us think a lot about what defines these types of works, because it's hard to put them in a category or in a box. Right.

**Titi:** Right. And I know that this can't be the first instance of it, but it feels like this new renaissance or something like that or like a huge boom in this space.

**Zakiya:** So that leads us to today's topics. We're talking all things Black horror, Afro futurism and a little bit of sci fi, too.

**Titi:** And we are so excited. So let's jump into the recitation. So what do we know?

**Zakiya:** I know Lovecraft country has been on the tip of everyone's tongues.

**Titi:** Absolutely.

**Zakiya:** It's been one of these major entry points for people who may not have been paying attention. It feels like how people felt about Black Panther when they entered the MCU. And I was like, hey, black people, we've been here. I've been trying to X-Men cards since I was in the third grade. What's up?

**Titi:** You were tradin X-Men cards?.

**Zakiya:** You didn't see them Oh, I have to send him to you. Yes, girl,.

**Titi:** I aint have any X-Men cards.

**Zakiya:** It's OK.

**Titi:** But I did like X-Men. Storm was my favorite because she's black.

**Zakiya:** Representation We need that.

**Titi:** You see how that works. Another thing that I feel like we know is that we're seeing a lot more exposure and projects that are related to Black horror and Afro futurism like blockbuster movies and these huge, huge TV shows like Lovecraft Country and Watchmen.

**Zakiya:** Jordan Peel's films, Janelle Monet's Dirty Computer. Those are kind of contemporary adaptations or representations of Afro futurism. Even Black Is King, right? These all draw heavy on what they consider the, you know, the Afro futurism cannon and those influences. And those aren't all visual. So we know they exist, but we don't really know what they are. You know. And that kind of leads us to all the stuff we don't know and that we want to know.

**Titi:** Right. So I want to know, what is Afro futurism? What defines it? What specific elements are folks looking for in order to put it into that category?

**Zakiya:** And so often I find that we're saying Afro futurism and all these other descriptors. How do we distinguish Afro futurism from sci fi and Black horror? Where does one end and the other begin?

**Titi:** That's a very good question. And then I want to know a timeline of the history of Afro futurism, like where did it start? Who were the trailblazers? Who was the first person to think of stuff like this? I want to know that.

**Zakiya:** Mm hmm. That's a good question. And because we don't know where it started. Are there other places where it exists and we may not even realize it?

**Titi:** I'm sure. And then what are the specific themes for Afro futurism? What do we need to see in order to know when we see something that that is what we are looking at?

**Zakiya:** Like, so you mean like kind of some visual cues, some things like like whenever you see something with the big eyes, you're like, oh this is Disney style. This is Pixar style. This is Afro futurism style. This is horror.

**Titi:** Exactly.

**Zakiya:** And then are, you know, with this big boom, are there tropes to avoid? I feel like with any genre, sometimes people get lazy. Like, are there things that people just fall back on and they're just really flat and we ought to stay away from that.

**Titi:** And then I just want to know the future. Honestly with the way the things are looking now. I'm like, yo, what are movies and things and TV shows gonna look like a year from now? Two years from now, 10 years from now? It's gonna be wild.

**Zakiya:** I'm ready for the next show.

**Titi:** All right. So let's jump into the dissection.

**Zakiya:** Our guest were today's lab is Dr. Kinitra Brooks.

**Dr. Brooks:** Hi. My name is Dr. Kinitra Brooks and I am the Audrey and John Leslie endowed chair in Literary Studies at Michigan State University.

**Titi:** First, we wanted to hear Dr. Brooks explain what Afro futurism is. But before we get into the nitty gritty with that, let's talk about genres first. How are things categorized?

**Dr. Brooks:** Literature has multiple genres, drama, romance. And so you get in sort of this box and there's sort of these definitions of what it should look like. And there are certain motifs. We know if there's a cowboy film, there are going to be 10 gallon hats. They're gonna be guns. There's going to be horses. There are certain things that mark that something is a Western. So the same way with horror and with fantasy and with science fiction. Those were always sort of pushed to the side. And so they were considered a different genre.

**Zakiya:** So we've always had these elements that signal to a reader or viewer or participant or whatever to kind of tell you what genre of art you're consuming.

**Dr. Brooks:** We know horror will have elements such as a ghost, will have a haunted house. Fantasy becomes a little bit more difficult to define because it's about these worlds that are built often based on other worlds. And magic can happen in there. Science fiction, there's hard science fiction there's soft science fiction. But they are based on technologies. They're based on hard core science facts.

**Titi:** So with Afro futurism, we commonly see clustered with sci fi and horror. It's kind of really hard to pin down, but there is a difference. So we asked Dr. Brooks, what about Afro futurism? What is it really?

**Dr. Brooks:** I usually speak about Afro futurism as a theory of time. And it's where the past, the present and a future are not linear. They're all conflated. A part of the present is looking at the past and recovering what was lost and what we're going to take with us into that future that so many of us imagine. So I'm a part of the recovery project.

**Zakiya:** Shari R. Thomas is a scholar who calls Afro Futurism "speculative fiction from the African diaspora". So sometimes we see things that are sci fi and they just added in black people. But that's not Afro futurism. It's not just black people in space.

**Titi:** It also addresses their ancestry. So it doesn't just put a black person in a futuristic space. It takes into account their history, their lineage and what effects that might have on who they are presently in the future.

**Zakiya:** Yeah, and I think a key part of Dr. Brooks work is recovering, interweaving and assessing the remnants of the past. And so this could be spiritual traditions or philosophies or cosmologies. And she's saying, OK, how does this show up in how does it affect the future in these works? What are the origins of Afro futurism? How did it start?

**Dr. Brooks:** Well, there are a couple of points. One, the idea of the conflation of the past, present and future is a very old idea. And multiple peoples had this idea. So the Akan people of what is now Ghana. The doggon people of Mali. And it's not just a West African concept. This applies in parts of eastern Asia. We see this in a lot of non Western European traditions. We even see it in indigenous European traditions. This is not a new idea.

**Titi:** So the idea of futurism has been around since the beginning of time and all over the world. And that makes sense because folks were imagining what the lives of their descendents would be like.

**Zakiya:** And so when we started thinking about Afro futurism. We really can layer it on what we consider, you know, classical literature and sci fi and see how Afro futurism grew along with it. So you have sci fi as the spin off of classical stories. Its science fiction was growing as a field and was basically taking stories that were already known and injecting technology and science into them. So that's science fiction, layering on top of classic stories. All the while, you have Afro futurism growing alongside science fiction. You have to remember science fiction wasn't a respectable genre back then. So you have these reputable black writers. So Delaney, Chesnut and Johnson, you can see more about their work in our show notes. They're telling these stories that explore the changes between society and science. But through this historical black lens. So they don't necessarily want to be affiliated with science fiction anyway because they're really looking at race and society and culture. And they're respectable writers, not just like Pulp Fiction.

**Titi:** Right. They're taking an academic approach to it and really trying to project and extrapolate how the future will look for Black folks.

**Zakiya:** Yes. And there's so much more to consider there. Please check out our show notes.

**Titi:** So you mentioned Delaney, Chesnut and Johnson. But who are the trailblazers and when did we see black people start telling horror stories?

**Dr. Brooks:** My book on black women and horror "Searching for Sycorax" exists because folks told me black women don't do horror. And the easiest way to piss me off is to tell me black women don't do something. I was like, Oh, I got you. And I say that Zora Neale Hurston, I really look at her as the first black woman horror writer. And I say this because she has a collection of stories in "Every Tongue Got to Confess". And she's going around and basically giving the oral histories and tales from people around them. And she has a whole section called Hate Tales and Devil Tales. And so we have this establishment, this tradition here. We have DuBois writing "The Comet", Shari Thomas. She has a collection of stories called "Dark Matter". Right. And so this tradition is here. It's about where to look.

**Zakiya:** That's so wild, because I've read Zora Neale Hurston and Du Bois. And I have never considered it through this lens. Right.

**Titi:** Right.

**Zakiya:** I think this is exactly what we needed to kind of shine a light.

**Titi:** Yeah. It makes you think about all of the things that we read in high school and college and say, hmm, maybe this wasn't just like traditional literature, like maybe this is Afro futurism. Maybe this is horror or maybe this is sci fi. We're gonna take a quick break. And when we get back, we're going to talk about where black horror and Afro futurism are hiding in plain sight

and where these genres are going in the future. We're back. And the next question that we have for Dr. Brooks was, where are black horror and afro futurism hiding in plain sight?

**Dr. Brooks:** We just have to look at the reality that so much of our stuff is oral, so much of our stuff passes down individually or in small groups. And just because you can't find something within the general public does not mean it doesn't exist.

**Zakiya:** This is such a good point. I feel like we're always talking about the printing press and who had access to it. But it really shapes what we consider to be logit history.

**Titi:** Right. The printing press has white supremacy in every single cog and screw.

**Zakiya:** But when you think about the stories that are told in your family and passed down, it's not hard for me to see it.

**Titi:** Honestly. I mean, because even present day, we passed down different stories from our families, generation to generation.

**Dr. Brooks:** My family has this duality where they are very, very good, upstanding Christians. But there were always these whispers about likes who can talk to the dead? Who has this relationship with the dead? Well, your aunt so and so visited me last night as she said this, this and this. And I don't think that multiplicity is anything for us to be ashamed of. I think it's a beautiful thing in our family. But I also have to deal with the idea that it makes some people in my family uncomfortable. It's this push and pull with my mom because I know she's also dealing with her own feelings about what has happened and what has been done with her belief system. But she also is this wealth of knowledge. And she tells these stories and I learn all these things about my family and about everybody in Plaquemines Parish. She's like, you usually go talk to so-and-so and you need to be with so-and-so. And so she gets into it. And these really, really interesting ways.

**Zakiya:** To all the people I love. I tell you, if I die, I will come back and haunt you. And if you should perish before me, please come back and haunt me, too.

**Titi:** Yes. This is something that Zakiya tells all of her friends and I don't know if I can commit to haunting her.

**Zakiya:** I'm just saying, if it's an option. Be my guest. Be my guest. put our friendship to the test.

**Titi:** you talk to me all about it all the time about how in your family that you guys talk about these types of thing.

**Zakiya:** Yeah. You know, I will say into to my dad, come back and haunt me. And he said, oh, you mean a haint. And I was like, no. I mean haunt. And he was like, yeah, like a haint. And I was like. We're using these vowels differently. This is a verb. It seems like he's talking about a noun. And Dr. Brooks just confirmed that it's called a haint in different storytelling.

**Titi:** Yeah, I was with you, Uncle Curtis.

**Zakiya:** So even when we don't realize it, there's a little bit of horror and Afro futurism going on all around us.

**Dr. Brooks:** Yeah. And you guys are speaking about Afro futurism as genre and including horror under it because black folks don't necessarily pay attention to genre. And there's a part of my book where I say that black women genre writers are writing fluid fiction. And I say they don't pay attention to that This is horror. This is science fiction. This is fantasy. They write and they blend these things together and that often it can act as a mirror for the simultaneous oppressions that black women feel. Right. And experience. So it's not just womanhood. It's not just racial. It's not just class. It's not just sexuality. It's all of those things together. And they're always flowing. I look at it as a political tool as well. Right. If you're constantly in motion, it's hard to pin you down and stereotype. It's hard to stop the development of who you are. So black women are always oscillating, they're fluid. You cannot pin us down to one of our identities and therefore lock us into something because we refuse to be locked in your small boxes.

**Zakiya:** And I think we see Misha Green doing this exact thing with Lovecraft Country. So on screen, we're just weaving in and out of these different elements.

**Titi:** Yes. It feels like horror sometimes because it can get a little bit gory with some of the killing. Yeah, but then you're dealing with monsters. So that seems a little bit like sci fi ish.

**Zakiya:** Yeah. Then you're on a whole Indiana Jones type quest for a secret book.

**Titi:** Next year in space and then next year time traveling and doing something that seems very, very futuristic with like chips in your arm and stuff like that.

**Zakiya:** But then I also feel like I'm getting a little bit of Soul Food vibes like Hippolyta is our big mama of sorts. We see her bringing the family together.

**Titi:** But then you also have a love story being told between Lettie and Tic. So it's giving you all of these like Love and Basketball vibes and stuff like that.

**Zakiya:** Lovecraft is a 10 and one is when those 10 and one pens you remember those you. Now, you write with one click, click again, you write what, another color?

**Titi:** Yes,.

**Zakiya:** She's doing that with genres.

**Titi:** Technicolor screenwriting

**Zakiya:** You've got to keep your eyeballs peeled.

**Titi:** I mean, there's so much there's family dynamics, everything.



**Zakiya:** And I really think because it's not easily boxed into one genre. When you're watching, you have to engage on this deeper level and ask what's happening? What am I thinking about this?

**Dr. Brooks:** And that's why Lovecraft country is so hard to define, right? It's fluid genre fiction. I can't look at straight dramas. I can't look at 12 Years a Slave. I can't handle something like that. I need something where somebody's ancestor is going to go come in and set everybody on fire and take you to the ancestral space and teach you how to do the spells and all this sort of stuff. I need that's sort of agency within it. And I also need that sort of sense of magic, because we've always had these ontologies or ways of being where we have this magical aspect, not about us, but that the magic is possible.

**Zakiya:** Magic or that's another element. I guess that's what we really want to know. What are the specific themes in Afro futurism and are there any tropes that you should really avoid?

**Dr. Brooks:** I think it still has to be done well. You've got to do your homework. You've got to read. You've got to watch. Some of the best stuff is not visual because for so long, black folks been excluded from creating films and television shows. You've got to go to the comics. You've got to go to the literature. You know, horror is about an excess of emotion when black horror is done, well, you feel all those emotions. And so it's not just anybody can get in this game. I talk about that scene in which Nana Hattie, her skin is melting off of her skeleton as she burns. And I say this is when horror is operating on all cylinders that we can see the awesomeness of this as something that should be considered grotesque. But we're actually crying with sadness when it's happening. We feel that empathy for her.

**Zakiya:** I was definitely crying in that scene from Lovecraft country just too much.

**Titi:** Yeah, it was a really emotional scene because, you know, the power in it, she has to die in this way in order for things to happen the way they're supposed to happen. And it's just heart wrenching. But then also powerful and pretty grotesque, honestly, because we are watching her burn alive.

**Zakiya:** I think there are scenes in Black Panther that are like that for me. Do you remember in Get Out when ol' boy takes that picture in, that flash goes off.

**Titi:** Right.

**Zakiya:** And that guy's like, get out. Like, even though I've never had that exact feeling. It almost feels like when you get to a place. Have you ever experience going somewhere? You're like, oh, finally somebody else that looks like me, let me go talk to them. They're like, this, ain't it? Like those mirages in the desert. You think you found an oasis? And he's like, nope, that's just more sand.

**Titi:** Right.

**Zakiya:** And your stomach drops that feeling.

**Titi:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And then even at the end of get out when we think the main character might be about to die and then his friend comes out and kills a lady and it's like, yes, like you got you're so excited. But somebody something really, like, awful just happened. But you feel liberated, you know, like freedom.

**Zakiya:** Because we know it had a possibility of going a whole different way.

**Titi:** Exactly.

**Zakiya:** Depending on who is in that car.

**Titi:** Exactly.

**Zakiya:** Who gets seen automatically as the threat.

**Titi:** Because it was a cop car. We were like, oh, this is not going to end well. but then turned out to be his friend and you just feel like this overwhelming sense of joy.

**Zakiya:** And I think this is part of the appeal. Right. Watching something so layered and imaginative as Lovecraft makes me think I want more of this.

**Titi:** Exactly. I think that this is setting the tone for everything to come. So we asked Dr. Books about the future of Afro Futurism and horror. Where is it going?

**Dr. Brooks:** Right now, there's this huge renaissance of Y.A. literature of black girls and fantasy black boys and fantasy, I'm now being "the song of Raith and Ruin". We have Tomi Adeyemi's work. We have L. Penelope's work. We have "the rage of dragons". Oh, we have L.L. McKinney. She's done this like black girl retake on Alice in Wonderland. There's so much good stuff out there. I'm overwhelmed with it. But in such a good way because I would've hunger for this as a little girl, I love where it's going.

**Zakiya:** I think there's just so much out there and I'm learning more. Our producer just told me about a documentary of black horror on the shudder channels called Horror Noir.

**Titi:** Dr. Brooks has a book called Searching for Sycorax. And you should definitely check that out. It also can open the door into all types of horror.

**Zakiya:** I found my entry in. To horror, starting out with goosebumps, yall remember goosebumps and R.L. Stein. I jumped very shortly after that. My mom bought me Octavia Butler and Tananarive Due. Now, that is a jump that will have you scared in the night.

**Titi:** I think my entry was goosebumps, like you said. But then also on Nickelodeon, they had a show called Are You Afraid of the Dark?

**Zakiya:** Yes. I loved that.

**Titi:** They did these shorts where it was like a scary story, but it was like kind of kid friendly. There was nothing that was like super, super gory, but it was scary. And I think that's when I realized I actually like being scared because I would watch those episodes and just be like, oh, my gosh, I thought it was phenomenal.

**Zakiya:** Yes. And I think some people just like to be scared, you know? And there's, you know, there's something about activating that fight or flight response that will do it for me. Every time.

**Titi:** Every time.

**Zakiya:** But I want to be in danger. I want to be scared. But I want to really be danger. But I think there's something about showing all of these elements of what gets considered scary. And you can teach fear. Right. So we're not all scared of the same things. There are some things that get taught that you can be afraid of. These scientists did this experiment, which is totally unethical. But we already talked about the unethical origins of science in Lab 025, but they implanted fear in this child and he was like irrationally afraid of white bunnies. Right, because they were able to to show that you can train fear. If you really think about it, depending on who controls the narratives around scary stories, you can train fear. We've seen some people have been trained to be afraid of whole groups of people and their cultures.

**Titi:** Truth,.

**Zakiya:** Dr. Brooks really hit the nail on the head, kind of exposing who decides what should be scary.

**Dr. Brooks:** I always talk to my students, you know, I say things are about power dynamics. And I said, who does it in power for you to be afraid of your spiritual traditions? I always show them. I show them like Thor. I show them Loki. I show them Odin. And I'm like, you pay money to see these nine Abrahamic traditions. You take statues of Buddha and bring them into your house. You celebrate Thor, God of Thunder. But when we bring in Shango, you scared? Do you realize that you are only afraid because these were traditions that gave enslaved folks power, that gave enslaved folks identities. So why are you paying money to see one and then you will step out the room and leave when I mentioned the other. Power dynamics, who is empowered by these things existing as they are, it ain't you, it ain't your grandma?

**Titi:** This is so true. And when she's talking about Shango, that is an Orisha that is from the Yoruba faith. So Nigerian faith, the traditions of the enslaved people and the things that they did to survive. So like the medicine that they created for themselves, we've automatically said, oh, that's like devil's work. But then we have people who do acupuncture. And I'm like, why have you decided that acupuncture is OK? But then things that are from a different culture is unacceptable. We've been trained to have these biases, even for things that are of the people that we are from.

**Zakiya:** This takes us right to blood magic. We saw in Lovecraft country the protection over that house and the people like, oh, that's dark, there's evil. I can't believe they're showing this or this primitive to believe these things. But if you believe that you consume the body and blood of Christ every first Sunday of the month. If that's not blood magic, I don't know what is. Did you see the Da Vinci Code? They traced a blood line through centuries. If this is not some vampire type stuff, followed a sign of the rose and it's about the womb. I'm like, what is going on here? The chalice is the womb. This is too much. The uterus is a cup?

**Titi:** We can make any religious tradition look pretty grotesque and scary. But if we see the beauty in everyone's culture and traditions, then none of it is scary. And it's just what your family, your ancestors did to survive. And you won't just do what's cool at the time. Like, I see all your buying crystals, burning sage and all these things like that. And I'm just like, OK, well, where did you get that from? And how come when other folks are doing communion, that is also OK. But then when you have folks that believe that certain spirits or gods are guiding their lives, you're like, that's crazy. Why?

**Zakiya:** It's all in the framing of rituals and I think we have to break those barriers of who's credible and who's approved and OK and civilize and who's not. All of these are fake markings.

**Titi:** Right. I'm of the school of if you like it, I love it. Whatever you do, whatever traditions that your family or that you're starting in your family. Because I realize some people might not necessarily know the traditions of their people because of slavery and the loss of those traditions and cultures. And so you're re defining or finding those those traditions. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. And I think it's actually a really beautiful thing. So that just leads us to the point that representation in media is so crucial. And it's not just, oh, you have this one black person in this horror film or whatever. It's about also bringing in their ancestry and culture and telling their story. Just having a person of color on screen. It means nothing if they don't have a fully developed character that you can truly see yourself in.

**Zakiya:** We're not showing up and dying first. We're over that.

**Titi:** Some of the characters that I think of when I think of black folks and representation in like science fiction and horror and things like that, I go all the way back to Star Trek. My dad is a huge Star Trek fan, and so I've watched a lot of Star Trek.

**Zakiya:** I would not have guessed that about Mr. Shodiya.

**Titi:** Right. But he is like he's a big fan. He loves Star Trek and Star Wars and all, everything that science fiction. And so one of the first black folks I know, he wasn't the first because there was Uhura in the original Star Trek series it was Nischelle Nichols. And people loved her. I mean, it was she was perfect in that role. But I also remember and the character that has the strongest tie in my mind was Geordi La Forge from Star Trek The Next Generation. And that was played by LeVar Burton. A lot of you guys know him as the Reading Rainbow guy.

**Zakiya:** Or depending on your generation Kunta Kinte from Roots.

**Titi:** Right. And he was so, so critical to my love for Star Trek because he was like one of the only black characters that I had ever seen. And so I really loved him being a part of the story and then telling his story and his perspective and all of the things that he brought to the table because representation is so important.

**Zakiya:** Well, hold onto your socks, Titi, because we got a little surprise for you.

**LeVar Burton:** Hey, Titi and Zakiya LeVar Burton here dropping in to this week's edition of Dope Labs to talk about representation in the genre. You know, I believe for a long time that there is a sort of a "soul-lular" learn line, not cellular, but soul-lular line that begins for me with Kunta Kinte at one end and at the other end is Geordi La Forge. And in the middle of that soul line, if you will, is LeVar and the Reading Rainbow guy. And I say that to say that my journey in in media has been one that I never could have predicted. And in these three roles, it becomes really clear to me that my destiny path has been about representation in modern media, in modern storytelling, making sure that we were there right. Being a black man on PBS and representing for literacy and the written word meant an enormous lot to me, the son of an English teacher. So, yes, I believe that representation more than matters, it is essential for culture to realize its full potential for the people.

**Titi:** This made me very emotional listening to that, because I feel like he has LeVar Burton has been such a huge part of my life. Like, I feel like at every stage he has been a part of it. And him being on screen has been so important to my love of science, science fiction, anything futuristic like and I feel like he has had influence on such a huge influence on that space. So hearing from him and hearing him talking straight to us.

**Zakiya:** It's wild.

**Titi:** I don't even know what to do. Dr. Brooks and LeVar Burton gave us their thoughts on the future of storytelling.

**Dr. Brooks:** I'm interested in what the order is going to look like 15 or 20 years from now because it's influenced the new generation. It's going to be so good.

**LeVar Burton:** One of the things for me about this modern age of of digital storytelling is that no one can prevent you from telling your story. If you have a desire you have the tools at your disposal to not only make your story, but also get your story seen to distribute your story through social media and you know and by any other means necessary. So I think we are in an age of the democratization of content creation, both in print and in video visual storytelling. And yet we still have so much further that we can go. Obviously, it's a long way before we get to equity in the diversity of the stories that we tell.

**Zakiya:** That's it for Lab 034. But we have so much more for you to dig into on our Web site [dopelabspodcast.com](http://dopelabspodcast.com). Click on cheat sheets and go right to Lab 034. We want to hear from you. Leave a comment.

**Titi:** On our website you can find a cheat sheet for today's lab along with a ton of other links and resources in the show notes.

**Zakiya:** And if you want to stay in the know with Dope Labs. Don't forget to sign up for our newsletter on our site, too.

**Titi:** Special thanks to our guest expert, Dr Kinitra Brooks.

**Zakiya:** Follow her on Twitter at @kk8dee16. And for even more links to our work. Check out our show notes. Also, we love hearing from you. What did you think about today's lab? Do you have ideas for Future Labs? Call us at 202-567-7028 and let us know.

**Titi:** You can find us on Twitter and Instagram @dopelabspodcast.

**Zakiya:** Titi is on Twitter @dr\_tsho.

**Titi:** And you can find Zakiya @zsaidso.

**Zakiya:** Follow us on Spotify or wherever else you listen to podcasts.

**Titi:** Dope Labs is produced by Jenny Radelet Mast and Lydia Smith of Wave Runner Studios.

**Zakiya:** Mixing a Sound Design by Hannis Brown.

**Titi:** Our theme music is by Taka Yasuzawa and Alex Sugiura with additional music by Elijah 'LX' Harvey. Dope Labs is a production of Spotify and MegaOhm Media Group.

**Zakiya:** And it's executive produced by US.

**Titi:** Titi Shodiya.

**Zakiya:** And Zakiya Whatley.