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**Sparks from the Tail of a Comet: Historical Materialism and Genetic Imperialism in
Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Novels**

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Abstract: Through a close reading of Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989), this article examines how implicitly decolonialist science fiction is shaped by the socio-historical context of the Cold War. Writing against notions of American exceptionalism, Butler's tacit critique of settler colonialism argues against social systems that assign value based on identity. The structure of this argument glosses Frederic Jameson's critique of the limits of utopian structures in science fiction, mostly drawn from his critical tome *Archaeologies of the Future*. Butler uses characterization, particularly of the protagonists—Lilith, Akin and Jodah—in the three novels to produce a critical model for understanding the limitations and potential of narratives about alien colonization as a means of exploring the radical potential of human collaboration as a means to end identity-based oppression. The novels work in tandem to produce a unified transformative narrative that frames subjugation, difference and subjectivity as problems to be solved within a nationalizing system, which reveals how the series is complicated by the late capitalist world system into which it was published.