Write a three- to five-page essay in response to one of the following:

1. Sometimes the most telling moment in a story occurs as it closes. Look again at your responses to the two-stage conclusion to Du Bois’s “The Comet” (1920). [Stage one: the last-minute appearance of Julia’s beau, Fred. Stage two: the emergence from the crowd of Jim’s wife. (16-18)] Did these closing moments ring false for you, as they did for me? Consider connecting Du Bois’s ending to Wells’s, in The War of the Worlds, where the philosophical writer is reunited with his wife in Woking. You might also (or instead) want to contrast Du Bois’s ending with the climax of Schuyler’s novel, which we learn about, rather graphically, from Delany’s essay on racism (384-385). Don’t overgeneralize about the power of endings, but do reexamine ways in which crucial narrative and thematic elements of a story can be reinforced or dissipated or otherwise transformed by its last lines.

2. I opened our recent handout on definitions of science fiction with this advice: Consider all texts—science fiction and otherwise; novels, short stories, movies, whatever—as participating in a system of production, distribution, and consumption. Apply this notion to Delany’s more elaborate and extended double-exploration of racism and science fiction, which he analyzes as systems (383-397). Cull from his essay’s narrative and analytical details what you take to be his main insights into the “and” of “Racism and Science Fiction.” You might want to illustrate these points by reexamining your reactions to any of our tales, including (from the readings for essay set #7) Delany’s own “Aye, and Gomorrah…” Feel free to go back to our Du Bois story and/or to the Schuyler excerpt, or forward to Bell’s “The Space Traders” (1992), in addition to (or instead of) Delany’s 1967 story. Whichever texts you select as test cases for your understanding of Delany’s essay, recognize that you are reading as the Other, one of this science fiction’s best defamiliarizing tools.

3. For a more explicit version of reading as the Other, consider Bell’s “The Space Traders.” That is, examine his long short story in light of its multiple perspectives on race in a January 2000 that lay in the future for his original readers. Some questions you might want to address: Why (and how) does Bell present so many sides to the core debate confronting his imaginary but remarkably familiar America? (That debate, of course, is over whether or not to accept the Space Traders offer.) Were any of the voices actively participating in this complex debate more persuasive than the others for you? How so? And what the heck do you make of a short story with endnotes? You might want to compare “The Space Traders” to our other selections from Dark Matter, or consider links back Clarke’s Childhood’s End.

4. Create your own topic in response to one or more of our current readings.

Remember our two key questions:
1. **How** do you know what you know?
2. **Why** do you feel what you feel?