

Jake Sisko and Cosmic Black Adolescence in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*

When Jake Sisko has big news to break to his father, he agrees to go on a week's sailing trip in a boat his father built. The moment Jake finally confesses that he wants to go to school to be a writer, rather than follow in his father's footsteps, is the moment their ship gets pulled off course by a strong current, disabling their navigation. But that lack of navigation – a defining feature of Jake's adolescence – doesn't leave him stranded for long. As one of the first characters in the *Star Trek* franchise who gets to keep his racial identity as African American, along with his father and the series' lead Benjamin Sisko, Jake is a character in unknown territory for the pop culture behemoth, and as such, never perfectly fits in with the "utopia" that the Federation of United Planets represents. Unconscious in the opening scene where his mother is killed by Borg-controlled Picard – the lead of the previous *Trek* series – the first time we meet fourteen year old Jake is next to a peaceful, holographic pond on a Federation ship. Jake is a child of the Federation and its promise of peace and diversity; but aboard the non-Federation boat that his father built – a small, engineless spacecraft that travels by solar wind – and the non-Federation space station on which he spends his adolescence, Jake is also forever outside the seemingly utopic Federation. Turning away from a future in Starfleet, his desire to be a writer allows him to critique the Federation. On that same space-sailboat, Jake shares with his father a short story he wrote in which he empathizes with the Maquis, a Federation-labelled terrorist group. While recent years have seen work done on race in *Deep Space Nine*, no work has been done on Jake Sisko and his experience of adolescence. Growing up on the space station, Jake learns of the Federation's faults as the audience watches, and his literacy and growth as a writer highlight his nature as both promise and critique of a system that preaches diversity but fails to follow through with empathy.