

Charting Diaspora Within the Black Utopia: Liberia, Eatonville, Harlem, Wakanda, and Beyond

By

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Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

December 15, 2018

Nashville, Tennessee

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To my beloved mother, Sheila R. Casey, who has been supportive of my studies and research since the inception of my academic career.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without my ancestors and fictive kinships both on the continent and in the diaspora, who are victims of various forms of systemic prejudices or without the numerous prominent scholars who have contributed to the field of critical race studies. I am thankful for Vanderbilt University's (VU) English Department who has been very supportive of my intellectual pursuits, the financial support of VU's Arts and Science Fellowship, and the Robert Ransom Myers Graduate Student Research Award that provided me the funding to deliver a condensed form of this project this year at the African Literature Association Annual Conference in Washington, District of Colombia.

I am especially grateful to everyone who I have had the opportunity to work with on this project as well as others. As former projects are concerned, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for Drs. Kathaleen E. Amende, Mark Hill, Paula Backscheider, and James Emmett Ryan who were instrumental in piquing my interests in the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality studies. In working on this project, I would especially like to thank Dr. Jay Clayton whose 19th-Century Science Fiction course shaped the core of this project and my thesis director, Dr. Hortense Spillers, who further encouraged me to explicate the issues discussed herein in her course, *The Idea of Black Culture*. Since my undergraduate education, Dr. Spillers's scholarship on black feminism and African American studies has been a great inspiration.

No one has been more supportive of me than my mother, Sheila R. Casey, who not only inspired me to become a writer but whose care and guidance is always embedded within me. Thank you for your unconditional love.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I discuss a brief history of Western colonialization and the few remaining predominately Black inhabited interstices that developed thereafter, such as the Republic of Liberia, Eatonville, Florida, and Harlem, New York. I note that there is no concentration of Black individuals and culture that has not been infiltrated by imperialism and globalization and although there are a few predominantly Black, small towns scattered about the globe, they exist only in isolation. Furthermore, since the history of Black peoples has been obscured, I argue that the future of this great race is unrealized. As a result, I consider how it is the job of writers and works of art in the genre of Afrofuturism to pick up where prominent Black thinkers such as W.E.B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James, and Aimé Césaire left off in reimaging Black pasts and envisioning Black futures with the latest and perhaps most influential production seen in Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*. I consider how, given the history of Western expansion, a fictional nation is created for the Black Panther, who I assert is a Black nationalist figure, in contrast to Marvel's other nationalistic superheroes namely Captain America and Captain Britain. Lastly, I argue that *Black Panther*, in many ways, offers a critique of Western ideology and subversively aims to destabilize European thought in a Pan-Africanistic approach to unite "African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, [who] shar[e] not merely a common history, but a common destiny" (Chile qtd in Mawere 114-115).

The continent of Africa takes on the utopian form of the "motherland" in the minds of many Black Americans. A space where Black skin is welcomed not stereotyped; where Black is the "norm" not the marginalized. But the truth is that there are very few places in the world that have not felt the effects of Western imperialism. The few countries that were not conquered by

Europeans, such as Japan and China, have still felt the impact of globalization. Others like Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Korea struggle to hold fast their identity and culture from the absorption of more dominant ways of life. Sadly, of these countries, none are African nations. By contrast, all of Africa was colonized by the early twentieth-century. Even though Ethiopia has never officially been colonized, under the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, Italians invaded and occupied the country from 1935 until 1941. Liberia, on the other hand, is a Black populated, West African country but it was established as a colony for former African American slaves and descendants, so it is not untainted by the history of enslavement. Nevertheless, the effects of colonization in Africa and the enslavement of its people compels us to inquire what Black culture was like before.

Black Peoples Pre-Slavery and Colonization

What were Black people as a race or cultural group prior to colonization and enslavement? This question is difficult to answer because much documentation has been either obscured, propagandized, or plainly falsified so that the status of precolonial Black peoples changes depending on who is asked. While some scholars and Black historians such as C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins* (1938) assert that places such as “Central Africa was a territory of peace and happy civilisation,” (7) others argue that Black populated lands like those found on the continent of Africa prior to the nineteenth-century were primitive, a place of savagery and ‘backwardness.’ Paleolibertarian author, Ilana Mercer, for example, in an article titled “Africa: Before and After Colonialism” (2017), claims that Africa benefited from British colonization. Pointing to P. T. Bauer’s *Equality, The Third World, and Economic Delusion* (1981) to support her argument, Mercer claims that “Far from draining wealth from less developed countries...British industry helped to create it there” (Mercer 1). British historian and political

commentator, Niall Ferguson, similarly argues that “everywhere in Black Africa modern economic life began with the colonial period” (Mercer 1). According to Mercer, “the colonial powers enhanced, rather than hindered, progress” (Mercer 1). Moreover, as Mercer maintains, even though “all of these advancements interfered with traditional customs, they also advanced the continent materially” (Mercer 1).

The main problem with the arguments of such scholars is that it presumes two major fallacies in their way of thinking. The first misconception is that they believe that material progress outweighs the preservation of traditional customs and the second error is that they often fail to see that such development is achieved only through means of coercion. Mercer’s argument is built on the premise that “development, so long as it’s not coerced, is desirable and material progress good” (Mercer 1). However, this so-called development was in fact coerced. As scholars like James assert in his recount of the history and atrocity of slavery and colonization: “intolerable pressure [was put] on African peoples, which became fiercer through the centuries as the demands of industry increased and the methods of coercion were perfected” (7). In stark contrast to Mercer’s claims, many African scholars such as Ndirangu Mwaura argue that colonial rule looted Africa and failed to offer adequate compensation in return. As Mwaura explains in *Kenya Today: Breaking the Yoke of Colonialism in Africa* (2005), “during the colonial era the Europeans made profits from selling enslaved Africans; they invested some of those profits in Africa, but the profits made from those investments were quickly taken back to Europe, thus draining off African Wealth” (2). It is impossible to colonize a land without taking something from the way of life and culture of that land. The effects of colonization and slavery on the African continent and peoples were and are still devastating and long-lasting.

Just as Mercer, Bauer, and Ferguson romanticize the notion of colonization, many have romanticized the notion of slavery. But as Aimé Césaire notes in *Discourse on Colonialism*, “no one colonizes innocently” (39). Simply put, slavery was brutal, and this can be seen in James’s illumination of the chilling account of slaves boarded on slave ships:

The slaves were collected in the interior, fastened one to the other in columns, loaded with heavy stones of 40 or 50 pounds in weight to prevent attempts at escape, and then marched the long journey to the sea, sometimes hundreds of miles, the weakly and sick dropping to die in the African jungle...Contrary to the lies that have been spread so pertinaciously about Negro docility, the revolts at the port of embarkation and on board were incessant, so that the slaves had to be chained, right hand to right leg, left hand to left leg, and attached in rows to long iron bars...To the slave-traders they were articles of trade and no more. A captain held up by calms or adverse winds was known to have poisoned his cargo. Another killed some of his slaves to feed the others with the flesh...[When they were brought up on the deck once a day] Some took the opportunity to jump overboard, uttering cries of triumph as they cleared the vessel and disappeared below the surface. (8-9)

This story is one that no one likes to hear: the hard truth of how African peoples were inhumanely treated. By this account, it does not sound like this is a group of people who willingly agreed to be slaves, who willingly subjected themselves to such horrific mistreatment. Unlike this recollection provided by C.L.R. James that seems so distant from how we would like to imagine slaves were taken from Africa, we are much more familiar with the ill-treatment of slaves upon their arrival here in North America. Through the many non-fictional and fictional

recounts found in the literary works of Fredrick Douglas's *Narrative* (1845), Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), and television shows and movies such as *Roots* (1977), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and *Underground* (2016), we have become more familiar with accounts of slavery in America and the life of the Negro after emancipation.

The State of Black Peoples in the Diaspora Post-Slavery to Present

One such work that details the life of Black peoples post-emancipation that has maintained prominence since its publication is W.E.B. Dubois's *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903). Dubois's work is generated out of the stories of those oppressed. From a sociological perspective, he takes up the problem of Black peoples in post-slavery America. Dubois's *Souls of Black Folks* is a very insightful literary work as many of the things that he discusses over a century ago are still relevant today. The most applicable to the current state of Black America is his evaluation of the poverty and imprisonment ratio. Dubois explains to his audience of early twentieth-century readers that "once in debt, it is no easy matter for a whole race to emerge" and that "Crime, and a cheap and dangerous socialism, are the inevitable results" of the emancipation of a people who have little financial means (149, 150). Furthermore, on this topic of Black crime in America, Dubois illuminates:

There can be no doubt that crime among Negroes has sensibly increased in the last thirty years, and that there has appeared in the slums of great cities a distinct criminal class among the blacks. In explaining this unfortunate development, we must note two things: (1) that the inevitable result of Emancipation was to increase crime and criminals, and (2) that the police system of the South was primarily designed to control slaves...[I]ts police system was arranged to deal

with Blacks alone, and tacitly assumed that every white man was ipso facto a member of that police...[T]he police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply of criminals; and when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and almost universal device was to use the courts as a means of reenslaving the blacks. It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color, that settled a man's conviction on almost any charge. Thus Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims. (177-179)

Black Americans in the twenty-first-century are still dealing with the same racial disparities that Dubois discusses in the previous century. According to the United States Census Bureau, for the years of 2007-2011, "Blacks or African Americans" ranked at "25.8 percent" of the highest national poverty rate surpassed only by American Indians and Alaska Natives (who also suffered from colonization and enslavement) at "27.0 percent" (Bishaw et al.). A ranking of 25.8 percent means that "9,472,583" Black Americans are below the poverty line (Bishaw et al.).

In addition to strong financial disparity among Black Americans, there also exists an even stronger racial disparity in incarceration rates.¹ According to the NAACP, "Though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately 32% of the US population, they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015" (NAACP). In fact, "In 2016, there were 1,608 black prisoners for every 100,000 black adults – more than five times the imprisonment rate for whites (274 per 100,000)" (NAACP).

¹ It is also worth mentioning that many Black people do not even make it to court to stand trial for their alleged crimes. According to *The Washington Post*, nine hundred and eighty-seven people were shot and killed by police last year alone and of those killed, two hundred and twenty-three were black (Tate, Jenkins, & Rich, 1).

Other than the obvious unjust treatment of Black Americans, is there an ulterior motive behind these racial disparities? As Michelle Alexander explores in her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, since the collapse of the racial caste system known as Jim Crow, new methods have been developed to oppress the Black race. Alexander points out that the labeling of mass quantities of Blacks as criminals allows them to be subjected to similar forms of discrimination faced during the Jim Crow era including “employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service” to name a few (2). It seems that the same agenda of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century is still in effect today: to keep certain racial groups at the top of the hierarchy while oppressing others.

Not only are Black peoples in the diaspora of North America still facing the effects of colonization and slavery, Black peoples on the continent are as well. Mwaura highlights that “The present underdeveloped state of Africa is a result of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism” and further explains that “Africa lost its most productive people on a large scale and over several centuries, and as a result suffered social disruptions and wars, all of which combined to cause massive economic retardation” (2). Many of the same systems that the European colonizers used in Africa were taken up by African leaders after Europeans left. Therefore, the current economic structure is arranged to serve external interests. Africa’s economy, for example, relies heavily on exportation, therefore, goods that could be used to satisfy the needs of Africans are exported to other countries and for very little profit. This surplus flow of goods, which stimulates other economies, is part of a system that was developed by Europeans and grafted onto African society.

In the United States, keeping a large majority of Black peoples in the diaspora below the poverty line, victims of police brutality, and incarcerated behind bars providing cheap labor just like on the continent where they work to transport goods to wealthier countries for little return in profit, are all methods currently used to oppress an entire race of people. It is a way to continue modern day slavery in the guise of progress.

But not only has colonization and slavery negatively affected African peoples, it has also had lasting effects on the colonizers. Simply put, colonization does not serve either party. As Césaire explains, “colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism” (35). We can see this unjust reasoning with people like Mercer and Bauer in their attempts to justify colonization. In other words, colonization works against the colonizer, bending their sense of morality. One major facet of humanity is being sympathetic towards the needs, desires, —and most importantly—the pain of others. Civility is a major component of civilization: to be a civilization, one must be *civilized*. When one turns a blind eye towards another’s suffering or attempts to explain away or justify the suffering of another, they lose a bit of their sense of humanity. Césaire strongly asserts that “a nation which colonizes...and...which justifies colonization...is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which is irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another” (39).

This is the universal regression that Césaire warns of: “each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact...civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread...a poison” is “distilled” “and slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward savagery” (36). From Césaire’s perspective, this mistreatment of a race causes a “boomerang effect” (41).

To give an example of this “boomerang effect,” Césaire, pointing to Edgar Quinet, draws a parallel between the history of the Roman Empire and North America. Quinet asserts:

People ask why barbarism emerged all at one in ancient civilization. I believe I know the answer...The system of ancient civilization was composed of a certain number of nationalities, of countries which, although they seemed to be enemies, or were even ignorant of each other, protected, supported, and guarded one another...It happened that these nationalities were so many bulwarks protecting Rome itself....Thus when Rome, in its alleged triumphal march toward a single civilization, had destroyed, one after another, Carthage, Egypt, Greece, Judea, Persia, Dacia, and Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, it came to pass that it had itself swallowed up the dikes that protected it against the human ocean under which it was to perish. (75)

We can draw parallels from the historical trajectory of the Ancient Romans, to the Europeans, and Americans as Césaire predicts. The issues of our present day that at one time seemed foreign, unthreatening, and easy to ignore when it was happening to other racial and ethnic groups, are now suddenly knocking at the door of White Americans.

Americans have begun to destroy themselves at higher rates than ever before. Those who turned a blind eye when it was Black people who were the largest racial group suffering from drug addiction, Black on Black violence, and police brutality are now witnessing these atrocities at higher rates against their own race. Now the discourse is changing. Drug addiction, for example, has been a problem in Black communities for many years but now that it is beginning to affect White communities, it is being taken more seriously and even touted as a “crisis.” Drugs, like crack cocaine, have plagued Black communities since the 1980s, but now that

Opioids are beginning to affect large numbers of Caucasian Americans, it is now an “epidemic.” Similarly, with a quickly shrinking middle class, more and more White Americans are beginning to fall into a lower-class status and are therefore at risk of being targeted by Big Tobacco Companies and violent crimes. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that “Cigarette smoking disproportionately affects the health of people with low [socioeconomic status] SES. Lower income cigarette smokers suffer more from diseases caused by smoking than do smokers with higher incomes” (CDC). Likewise, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, “persons in poor households at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) (39.8 per 1,000) had more than double the rate of violent victimization as persons in high-income households (19.9 per 1,000)” (Berzofsky et al.). In other words, there is a correlation between poverty and violent crime. Additionally, police brutality against White racial categories is at an all-time high. When it was Black people like Michael Brown who were being killed at the hands of police, many people did not care; but now that White people are increasingly becoming targets, “White Lives Matter too.” And not only are White Americans dying at the hands of police brutality, they are also at a higher risk of being victims in school shootings. These accounts exemplify the barbarism that is becoming ever more rampant here in America.

If we are witnessing, in our present time, a collapse of civilization then, where do we as a people go from here? How do we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, as Booker T. Washington advised? Perhaps, the answer can be partly found in Césaire’s insight. Maybe we do not need to make a “utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond it” (52). Césaire suggests that “It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days” (52).

If we look to the past, we can see that Aimé Césaire is not the first person to envision this goal of a new society for Black peoples.

Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism

In the early 1800s, free Black peoples in America began to unite in an effort to build a society for themselves free of European interference. They were first known as the “colonization of free Negroes,” according to James Weldon Johnson in his book, *Black Manhattan* (1930). Johnson notes that “the Quakers put it into effect on a small scale by purchasing lands on which to settle their manumitted slaves in communities of their own. It grew from the plan for isolated Negro communities to that of settlement in a territory set apart in the western section of the country, then to colonization of West Indies” (39). From there, people began to suggest that Blacks return to Africa.

This notion was picked up by a freeman, Paul Cuffee. Cuffee was a sailor who “became master of his own ship” and in 1815 transported “nine Negro families, thirty-eight persons, to the west coast of Africa” (Johnson 40). This undertaking attracted the interest of the country, and in 1816 “a meeting of those interested in colonization was called in Washington, and an organization was formed to be known as the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Color in the United States” (Johnson 40). This is how the colony of freed slaves known as Republic of Liberia was founded.

This society, however, failed in their aims to transport the majority of free slaves from America back to Africa. The reason behind its downfall is that a large amount of Black people in America did not wish to return to Africa. They had become indoctrinated into the belief systems of White Americans and did not wish to return to their motherland. Instead, many Blacks began to desire to build their own communities in America and that is just what they did.

On August 15, 1887, the first all-Black municipality, Eatonville, Florida, was developed. Zora Neale Hurston—daughter of one of the founding fathers of Eatonville—described it almost in the image of a small utopia complete with “five lakes, three croquet courts, three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty of guavas, two schools, and no jail-house” (Hurston 4). Eatonville was one of the first places in America where a Black person did not have to constantly consider the color of their skin.

For example, growing up in Eatonville, Zora Neale Hurston had a very vague concept of race. As a child, she knew “White people differed from colored...only in that they rode through town and never lived there” (1040). At the age of thirteen, however, her world became very different. As Hurston describes, “I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, as Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl” (1041). By Hurston’s description here, Eatonville sounds almost like an Atlantis—a land separated by the sea from the rest of society and its sharp racial divisions and hierarchies of power.

After leaving Eatonville, Florida, Hurston does not seem to have found a place where her race was not the prominent feature that erased all other facets of identity until she experienced what it was like to enter what Johnson refers to as “Black Manhattan.” In her poem, “How It Feels to be Colored Me,” Hurston explains, “At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance....The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time” (1042). Hurston was more familiar with the social and economic dynamics of Harlem than most people who lived there. It was likely a home away from home for the author who originated from one of the first North American Black utopian-like cities.

The Harlem Renaissance (1918 through mid-1930s) denotes the development of Harlem, New York as a mecca for Black community and culture. In this third example, Harlem attempted to decolonize from oppressive North Americanist ideology and succeeded in having the largest population of Black individuals to occupy an American city. As James Weldon Johnson describes in *Black Manhattan*, once emerging from Central Park and entering onto Seventh and Lenox Avenue:

[Y]ou see [Black people] everywhere, and as you go up either of these two great arteries leading out from the city to the north, you see more and more Negroes, walking in the streets looking from the windows, trading in the shops, eating in the restaurants, going in and coming out of the theatres, until nearing One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street, ninety per cent of the people you see, including the traffic officers, are Negroes. And it is not until you cross the Harlem River that the population whitens again. (145)

With laws during slavery that controlled the congregation of Black bodies, segregation laws that prevented Blacks from entering many White-owned businesses, and a significant lack of Black-owned industries, it was a phenomenon to witness this many Black individuals together, moving freely about, and flourishing as a society. Johnson notes, that with the proliferation of jobs and money available to Black people, “The community was beginning to feel conscious of its growing size and strength. It has entirely rid itself of the sense of apology for its existence. It was beginning to take pride in itself as Harlem, a Negro community” (229).

Harlem was home to many Black-owned businesses, restaurants, night-clubs, theaters, and apartment-homes that attracted the gaze of many onlookers through the circulation of news reports, tourism of those visiting the Black mecca, as well as in the mass of people moving to

Harlem. For many people visiting and living in Harlem—with its predominant Black culture, gender-neutral establishments, growing community of immigrants, and its queer subculture—it was simply a place where one did not always have to take into consideration their race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Although Harlem and Eatonville attempt to build a Black nationalistic identity through the decolonialization of Black America, these two cities were unsuccessful in two major ways. First, unlike Eatonville, Florida, Harlem, New York was not a Black-governed metropolis. Though the city was incorporated by a predominate body of Black Americans, it was governed by a White city council. Secondly, although both cities were known as a center for Black individuals, Whites frequently passed in and out casting their gaze on the cities' Black inhabitants.

During this time, while some Black peoples were trying to establish Black dominated spaces for themselves in America, others were still trying to find a way to cease colonial control of Africa and to return home. In 1900, Henry Sylvester Williams and W.E.B. Dubois organized the first Pan African Congress in Paris which sought “to protest stealing of lands in the colonies, racial discrimination and other issues of interests to blacks” (Dubois qtd. in Abdul-Raheem 2). Just a few years later in 1919 at Carnegie Hall, Marcus Garvey announced his plan for what would become known as The Back to Africa Movement:

We are striking homeward toward Africa to make her the big black republic. And in the making of Africa the big black republic, what is the barrier? The barrier is the white man; and we say to the white man who dominates Africa that it is to his interest to clear out now, because we are coming...and we mean to retake every

square inch of the 12,000,000 square miles of African territory belonging to us by right Divine. (Garvey qtd. in Johnson 254).

Despite his mass following, Garvey's mission failed. But his vision lived on as he "stirred the imagination of the Negro masses as no Negro ever had" (Johnson 256). As of today, the dream of prominent Black thinkers such as Dubois, Garvey, and Césaire remains unrealized.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Since a Black space and identity has never been fully realized, as attempted in the Republic of Liberia, Eatonville, Florida, and Harlem, New York, speculative fiction provides a canvas where Black imaginings can find a home. Demystification of the past and envisioning and illuminating potential futures is the query that the speculative fiction sub-genre, Afrofuturism, takes up. "Afrofuturism," as Ytasha Womack explains, offers a "reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (9).

Mystification of the past and obscuring the potential of one's future, is a tool of the oppressor. As John Berger illuminates in *Ways of Seeing*, "History always constitutes the relation between the present and its past" (11). In other words, in our present moment, we situate ourselves in relation to our past. The past is "mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the roles of the ruling classes" (Berger 11). This notion is especially true for Black people whose past has been mystified and whose accomplishments have been obscured. So, if Black people cannot see a past where they as a people thrived but instead only a history of enslavement, it becomes that much more challenging to envision a future where the Black race is not oppressed.

In his article, "Black to the Future," Mark Dery illuminates how the "The notion of Afrofuturism gives rise to a troubling antinomy" and questions "Can a community whose past

has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?” (180). The answer to this question is “yes.” Perhaps, the “master’s tools” may not be enough to “dismantle the master’s house,” (112) as Audre Lord asserts, but they may indeed be enough to weaken the structure enough to allow the production of images of the Black race unadulterated by the savagery of slavery and representation of Black bodies uncommonly portrayed in superhero films. As Lorde asserts, “It is learning how to...make common cause with those others identified outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish” (112). Speculative fiction is a White-dominated literary genre that, among other topics, provides creations of possible worlds referred to as utopias and dystopias. Pointing to Christopher Priest’s novel *Inverted World*, Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future* highlights that inversion of the world creates distance that lets you see the world anew. If writers, taking it from the master’s arsenal, use this tool to create Black utopias, it has the potential to recreate pasts and illuminate possible futures.

Black utopian logic works to decolonize and delink from the colonial matrix of power by envisioning a nationality separate from European culture and thought. The latest Black utopia to reach mainstream popular culture, by way of the cinematic apparatus, finds its home in Wakanda, a fictional, technologically advanced nation in the Marvel Universe residing at the borders of Ethiopia, Kenya, Narobia, Somalia, and Uganda. The fictional superhero, T’Challa, better known as the Black Panther, who is featured in Marvel’s movie of the same name, first appeared in the *Fantastic Four* (1966) 52nd issue. In the film, following the death of his father, T’Challa returns home to Wakanda to ascend the throne as king, only to realize that an old enemy is threatening his nation as well as the state of the rest of the world.

Created by comic book writers and aficionados Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the origin of the inception of the Black Panther name is vague. Although rumors have circulated and since been dispelled that suggest the Black Panther Party Movement (1966) developed its name from the comic book series that was released a few months earlier, little scholarship has been produced to suggest that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby developed the name of their series from the Black Panther Party, formerly known as The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). Though the LCFO did not become known as the Black Panther Party until 1966, they established the Black Panther emblem (adopted from the mascot logo for Atlanta Georgia's Clark College) the previous year and had already begun to receive media attention prior to the publishing of Marvel's *Black Panther* (Ture & Hamilton, 98).²

Regardless of the origin behind the name of Marvel's *Black Panther*, as well as its possible ties to Black political movements in the United States, the Black Panther Party and Marvel's *Black Panther* comics share a common utopian vision—Black nationalism. An amalgamation of history, fantasy, and science fiction, the isolated nation of Wakanda is home to a civilization of Black inhabitants unadulterated by European imperialism. Furthermore, the Black Panther, in addition to his position as the first mainstream Black superhero to feature in a film, is also the first to shatter the archetype of the European superhero. Unlike the Falcon and War Machine, Black superheroes who have made their film debut as supporting characters in recent years, T'Challa does not work for the United States military or the S.H.I.E.L.D. but is instead the ruler of an isolationist African nation. As such, in an interview with Jevon Phillips,

² After the Black Panther Party began to draw much negative attention for its violence, Stan Lee attempted to change the name of the Black Panther to the Black Leopard, but the attempt was unsuccessful with fans. Born of an era of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, now is an appropriate time for the reincarnation of the comic series, considering the current political climate of movements such as Black Lives Matter. The film's soundtrack features a techno remix and combining of two songs which call for black revolution: Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1970), which discusses the skewing of media coverage and which became the slogan for the Black Panther Movement, and Vince Staples's BagBak which calls attention to the racial disparity of the United States' prison system and police brutality.

Chadwick Boseman, the actor who plays Black Panther onscreen, reveals that in developing the voice of the Wakandian ruler, he had to take care in accurately depicting the ruler of a nation that has not been colonized (Phillips 1).

But if we consider T'Challa to be a Black nationalist figure, which is a characteristic of many superheroes, including Captain America, Captain Britain, and so forth, as Jason Dittmer explores in his book, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphor, Narratives, and Geopolitics*, why is a fictional nation created for the Black Panther? Might it be for the reason that a truly Black nationalistic space only exists in utopian thought since even on the continent of Africa, there exists no Black civilization that has not felt the effects of European imperialism and post-colonization? Wakanda then, featured in *Black Panther* operates as a piece of revisionist or speculative fiction that allows us to reimagine a Black society free from the influence of imperialism.

Not only does Wakanda provide a view of the potentiality of the Black race unadulterated by colonization, it also offers a strong underlying message of unification of Black peoples. T'Challa and other Wakandans in positions of power debate whether or not to remain an isolationist nation or to extend their technologies and help to other Black peoples in the diaspora who suffer from various forms of oppression and ultimately, they decide to do so. If we read between the lines, Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* serves as a message that we are stronger together, that the Black race will overcome the oppression that it has sustained for far too long, and, most importantly, it provides an example of what we can become if we all stand in solidarity.

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