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## Marxist Analysis of Black Panther

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## **Abstract**

This Marxist analysis of the 2018 Marvel film *Black Panther* explores the film's underlying ideologies about African Americans. The film is known for its cinematography, action-packed choreography, soundtrack, and inspiring plot. On top of that, the majority of the main cast is African American. For many, this film represents progress. It has provided well-paying jobs to African Americans, a marginalized community with fewer opportunities in Hollywood. However, this analysis explores the aspects of this film that aren't as acknowledged, that hide behind the excitement of a Hollywood plot, and that may even contradict the praise that film has received. Under the magnifying glass that is Marxism, one might notice the failure to acknowledge the dominant culture's participation in Black oppression. In turn, this causes an unhealthy emphasis on Black-on-Black aggression, justifies economic disadvantages for the Black community, and gives an illegitimate portrayal of Black success—hiding it all under the guise of entertainment and progress. While this film has done wonders for the Black community, it is not benign.

*Keywords:* Marxism, Black Panther, Hollywood, oppression

## Introduction

Could the most successful Black superhero film be the most harmful to the Black community? “When black folks started revolutions, they never had the firepower or the resources to fight their oppressors. Yeah, that ends today. They’ll arm oppressed people all over the world, so they can finally rise up and kill those in power, and their children, and anyone else who takes their side. It’s time they know the truth about us!,” says the character Killmonger in *Black Panther* (2018, 1:29:54-1, 30:36). This quote provokes the question: What exactly is the “truth” about “us”? African American revolutions of the past, like the rise of the Black Panther Party, Dr. Martin Luther King protests, and even the success of the Underground Railroad, have received praise for creating equality. What Killmonger offers up is the theory that more financial resources for African Americans would lead to more violence. It is the idea that Black people are so vindictive, that with the correct resources, any White person and their children would be prone to a heinous fate. The public just hasn’t gotten to see it, “the truth,” because Black people “never had the firepower or resources to fight.” That sounds like a solid enough argument to refuse African Americans financial resources, and perpetuate the economic disparities in America today, which is what this analysis highlights about the text.

Through a Marxist analysis, one can not only discover what the movie *Black Panther* (2018) wants its audience to buy as “truth,” but the economic intentions behind these decisions. For analyzing the film, Arthur Berger (2019) states that Marxist analysis “seeks to explicate the manifest and latent or coded reflections of modes of material production, ideological values, class relations and structures of social power—racial or sexual as well as politico-economic—or the state of

consciousness of people in a precise historical or socio-economic situation” (p. 60). The film’s omission of the white power structure in the United States from the conversation on the roots of West African and African American strife has left room for an unhealthy portrayal of Black-on-Black aggression, the justification of economic disadvantages for the Black community, and an illegitimate portrayal of Black success.

### **Methodology and Research Description**

Berger’s *Media Analysis* offers a thorough understanding of Marxism and its subcomponents. A few things need to be understood before one can dive into the analysis. For one, capitalism is not just an economic system. It is a way of thinking, and an individual’s status within the system deeply affects the way they approach life: “The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness” (Berger, 2019, p. 56).

All in all, capitalism and economics are driving forces in the way we think and live. The entire story of *Black Panther* unfolds in both the United States and Wakanda. These are both capitalist environments. When we approach capitalism as a way of thinking, it is essential to keep this in mind when interpreting the characters’ behaviors and the writer’s motivation.

### **Theories of the Method of Analysis**

The following subcomponents are theoretical terms that have been derived from Marxism. Each of them is relevant to the analysis section of this paper. All of these

subcomponents work together to describe how *Black Panther* projects hegemonic ideas onto its audience members.

There are many sub-components to this method. For this analysis, only a few need to be defined and recognized. A key word that needs to be defined is hegemony: hegemonic ideas are presented as common sense to the world; however, they are ideas that are constructed and maintained by the dominant class. While hegemony presents itself as natural, it requires upkeep, as it upholds the unnatural dominance of the ruling class (Berger, 2019, p. 78). The central sub-component for this analysis is class conflict. Berger (2019) observes that, according to "Marx, history is based on unending class conflict...The two classes that Marx talks about are the bourgeoisie, who own the factories and corporations and form the ruling class, and the Proletariat, the huge mass of workers who are exploited by this ruling class and whose condition becomes increasingly more desperate" (p, 65). Defining who the bourgeoisie and the proletariats are, and most importantly, who they are not in this film, is crucial to an accurate view of what ideologies are being pushed. This analysis argues that the way class conflicts are portrayed in this film has the potential to warp the viewer's perception of class conflict in the real world.

Moreover, with this topic, it is vital to define the concepts of "base" and "superstructure." The base "represents the economic system found in a given society. This economic system, or mode of production, influences, in profound and complicated ways, the superstructure" (Berger, 2019, p. 58). The superstructure refers to the "institutions and values of a given society" (Berger, 2019, p. 58). Base and superstructure are significant because the film notably acknowledges a base

while ignoring a prominent superstructure. Another definition that is relevant to this analysis is alienation, which "suggests separation and distance; it contains within it the word *alien*, a stranger in a society who has no connections with others, no ties, no 'liens' of any sort (Berger, 2019, p. 68). One could associate alienation with isolation. It can refer to someone being an outcast by society. It is meant to be unsettling, and capitalism leverages a fear of alienation in the individual to contribute to a consumer society. In this film, fear of alienation is a driving force for many of our characters, and alienation could play a role in an audience member's perception of the film. A final term is "consumer society," in which, according to Berger, systems are in place to make the proletariat crave consumerism. This is relevant to the film's audience because Wakanda exists as and glorifies a consumer society. Oftentimes, this goes hand in hand with alienation because consumerism in a capitalist society is often driven by fear of alienation.

Overall, Marxism is the best analysis method to understand *Black Panther* (2018) because of the class conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist. Plus, the presence of vibranium as the MacGuffin, and its economic power, connects many of the central themes of the movie to economics. This analysis will acknowledge who the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are in the film, and what the movie invites us to believe about these two groups with a focus on economics.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review is meant to give a brief understanding of the film's current tone for overall acceptance by the mainstream public. With a Rotten Tomatoes critics rating of 96%, it is evident that *Black Panther* is a film that received rave reviews for

its quality. However, despite its wide acceptance, one might be surprised at some of the criticisms that journals and institutions have given this text.

In the article “Guess Who is Coming to the Oscars: Multicultural Breakthroughs in *Black Panther* and Other Recent Movies,” Beck (2018) begins by acknowledging the significance of superheroes in film. Unlike many mythical stories that are simply created to provide escapism, superhero works (both in comics and film) “depend on stories that require masses of helpless victims, threatened by horrific, irresistible evil” (Beck, 2018, p.163). In other words, superhero films hold weight in how they can provoke emotion. People see themselves in these films. They connect to the story’s victims because everyone can relate to feeling helpless in the world. This film, in particular, consistently points to West Africans and African Americans as the “masses of helpless victims.” The film refers to real-world struggles, and because Black viewers can see themselves in these roles, it is important to represent them and their strife in a respectable manner. The way victims are portrayed should be handled with care.

What one can gather from this notion in relation to *Black Panther* is the fact that the victims in the movie are based on real people, African Americans. Writers should tread carefully and make sure not to invalidate their experiences or overlook them. Beck argues that this may have been the case with *Black Panther*: “Wakanda, the Black Panther’s homeland, gets a new leader who comes from the big bad world of oppressed African Americans...However, rather than conquering the rest of the planet, the new goals of Wakanda are to share its accomplishments with the rest of the planet” (Beck, 2018, p. 164-165). Beck takes issue with the fact that African Americans are stereotypically violent and evil in this film, along with the fact that the

new leader still did not address the problems causing oppression. Wakanda simply started to share its resources. Beck compares this to a sort of white savior mentality.

On a brighter note, the article “Diffusion of Pro- and Anti-false Information Tweets: The Black Panther Movie Case, by Babcock et al. (2024), sings the movie’s praises by acknowledging its financial and critical success. According to the article the public played a negative role in the movie’s perception, by spreading false information about it on Twitter: (1) “Fake Attack posts claiming racially-motivated physical violence at movie theaters which were debunked, (2) Satirical Attack posts making similar but more exaggerated claims in an apparent attempt to mock or shame the original Fake Attack posts, [and] (3) Fake Scene posts claiming the film contained scenes (mostly racially-inciting)” (Babcock et al., 2024, sec. 3). The authors found that most negativity from the film came from people who did not stand for its inclusivity.

On a similar note, in the article “Revisiting Black Panther Movie to Teach Power Bases to Undergraduates in an HBCU,” Sahoo (2022), found that HBCU students would have a hard time paying attention to the lectures because they had no connection to the material. As Black people, they were not included in any of it, which made it hard to focus. Sahoo decided to incorporate the movie, which was new at the time, into the lecture to get the kids engaged, noting, “Black Panther is not the first black superhero movie, but it is one of the most successful in recent times. . . . It is the third highest revenue generator of all time.” Therefore, “[t]his backdrop provided an excellent opportunity. Black Panther is also an apt choice here as many of its characters are strong and interlinked with a diverse range of purposes, making

it an ideal scenario for teaching power and bases of power” (Sahoo, 2022, p. 330).

Sahoo’s attempt was successful and displays the positive impact that diversity in the movie created.

When observing these different sources, it is clear that this movie has some divisions when it comes to deciding how much progress it actually created. This scholarship helps guide this analysis in a way that allows one to see that this film has significantly affected the African American community and has made its mark. The message most relevant to this analysis, however, comes from Beck’s (2018) article. This is because the antagonist of the film is Killmonger, and there may have been economic motivations behind that choice that are not in favor of the African American community.

### **Description of Text: Killmonger vs Wakanda**

#### **What is Wakanda?**

Wakanda is a society in West Africa. Much of the plant life and minerals contain the power of the fictional metal vibranium. Within Wakandan territory resides five West African tribes. Wakanda is run by a king who is also the Black Panther. Wakandans hide their society and shield it from the world. Over the years, Wakandans have used vibranium to become the most technologically advanced society in the world (*Black Panther*, 2018, 0:13-1:45). In Wakanda, the warriors that defend the king and nation are women. Everyone is well dressed, the society is clean, and there are no clear signs of extreme poverty. However, there is a clear class system. Wakanda seems to be a hybrid between capitalism and communism.

At 33:14, T’Challa (the Black Panther) and Nakia (a confidant of the king and a

spy for Wakanda) are walking through a marketplace. There are some establishing shots showing people buying and selling food. There is also merchandise hanging around. One can also see that the roads are made of dirt, and there are no signs of high tech. In the next scene, at 34:36, there are establishing shots that show huts that the average Wakandans would live in. The huts are large enough for a small family and the roofs are made out of straw. At 34:41, viewers see people boiling something in a pot over a man-made fire. Their chairs are made of wood, and some of them sit on rocks. They herd their own animals as well. This group shows no signs of wealth. The average Wakandan does not appear to be rolling in wealth.

On the other hand, there is an upper class that includes the royals like T'Challa and Shuri (his sister). In the same scene, T'Challa receives a notification on his high-tech watch. When he raises his wrist, the audience can see a hologram with clear visuals and audio of one of his warriors giving him a military update. At 37:08, there is an establishing shot of the Wakanda castle that the royals live in. There are private planes flying over a cemented road. When the camera drones through the castle, viewers see unique architecture, a modern decor, and a futuristic aesthetic. This contrasting luxury points to a distinct class system. There are clear economic disparities in Wakanda.

With that in mind, there are also communist features of Wakanda. The people in the market show no signs of poor health and many of them participate in high fashion. Even with the class system, there is still economic prosperity for everyone. It is more than likely that resources (healthcare, education, etc.) are allocated fairly amongst the proletariat. On top of that, there does not seem to be private ownership of the most

valuable resource there: vibranium. Even the royals use it only when necessary. At 1:28:39, the audience sees that a heart shaped plant thrives in Wakanda. But it is not for sale, and no Wakandans are interested in buying it, for they are already taken care of. Wakanda seems like a hybrid of these capitalist and communist systems.

### **Who is Killmonger?**

Eric Stevens, otherwise known as N'Jadaka, is mostly referred to by his nickname: Killmonger. This nickname was given to him due to the extreme number of killings he has committed in his life. He is a Black man in his late twenties to mid-thirties. He has dreadlocks in his hair and speaks with African American vernacular. He falls deeply into the stereotype of a Black aggressive man. He grew up lower class in Oakland, California. His mother was an African American woman that was absent in his life. His father was prince N'Jobu of Wakanda, a spy for Wakanda that went rogue. He is half African American and half Wakandan. With his father's death in 1992, Killmonger was left an orphan as a pre-teen. He grew up to become an American black operative and a mercenary. He is a violent man who has killed people all over the world, resulting in many scarification marks on his body noting each kill.

### **Who is T'Challa?**

T'Challa is an African man in his mid-thirties. He is the Black Panther and king of Wakanda. He has the strength and superpowers to survive bullets and can heal himself. Unlike Killmonger, he is a man who tries not to resort to violence.

### **Who is Shuri?**

Shuri is an African young-adult woman and is the sister of the Black Panther. She is highly intelligent and is consistently creating new military technology for

Wakanda, everything from simulation airplanes to the Black Panther suits. She has made herself vital to the progress of Wakanda and the impressive advancements that the society has made. She is small and physically shows no signs of fighting power, but she makes up for this with her intelligence. Her position in the royal family and her occupation makes her an upper-class citizen of Wakanda.

### **Who is Nakia?**

Nakia is an African woman and a spy for Wakanda. She is a physically strong, intelligent, and a highly skilled woman. She is dedicated to the protection of Wakanda.

### **Analysis: The Omission of the White Power Structure in the United States**

The film has created a positive impact with an all-Black leading cast. However, through a Marxist perspective, there are some aspects of the film that promote the economic downfall of the black community. The film has omitted the white power structure in the United States from the conversation about West African and African American strife. This omission has left room for an illegitimate portrayal of Black success, an unhealthy portrayal of Black-on-Black aggression, and the justification of economic disadvantages for the African American community.

The introduction offers a narration with exposition about Wakanda. The film explains how Wakanda came to be, who the Black Panther is, and most notably in this context, why Wakanda needs protection and anonymity:

The tribes lived in constant War with each other until a warrior Shaman received a vision from the Panther Goddess Bast who led him to the heart shaped herb, a plant that granted him superhuman strength, speed and instincts. The warrior

became king and the first Black Panther, the protector of Wakandans. Four tribes agreed to live under the king's rule...But as Wakanda thrived, the world around it descended further into chaos. To keep vibranium safe, the Wakandans vowed to hide in plain sight, keeping the truth of their power from the outside world. (*Black Panther*, 2018, 0:39–1:34)

This movie parallels the real world in ways that make it hard not to see it as a metaphor for the real world. While it is fantasy, from the integration of West African tribes, to images of real-world conflict like WW2 planes, the fall of the Roman Empire, and other real-world events, while describing the world “in chaos,” the film asks the audience to explore how it reflects their reality. This request is fine, but when there are just enough parallels to pass as a poetic version of a harsh reality while withholding specific contexts that shape what is being reflected, we, the audience, find ourselves essentially being told half-truths about what our history looks like. A manipulation of the past creates a manipulation of the future.

To be specific, the audience is told that West Africans have been vulnerable, had their recourse denied, endured unfair conflict, and suffered the potential to be overtaken (colonized) by the chaotic outside world. However, the “who” and the “how” have conveniently been omitted. The first need for the Black Panther came from the fact that the five tribes were in constant conflict, also known as by Black-on-Black crime. Then it came from fear of the entire outside world being chaotic. But “who” in the outside world has caused this harm? And what harm could that be? Might it be slavery? The stripping of resources? Colonization? The answer is not present.

## **Illegitimate Portrayal of Black Success**

The descriptions above point to the Wakandan royal family being bourgeoisie, and Killmonger representing the proletariat. There is much consumption in the royal family. From the queen's fashion to Shuri's tech, it is clear that resources are not distributed evenly, and that the family sits high and looks low. However, what is impactful about this family's economic status is that their abundance extends beyond financial wealth. They are prosperous with community and love. Shuri and T'Challa aren't just siblings; they are friends. They have a loving mother and a loving father. They have a community that stands with them.

In contrast, our representative of the proletariat has none of this. Killmonger grew up in Oakland, California. His mother abandoned him, and King T'Chaka killed his father. He has had to work his entire life. Killmonger has no friends, no family, no empathy, and most importantly, no happiness. Throughout the movie, he is undesirable and alienated.

By making the “bougie” Wakandans the ones who are happy, prosperous, heroic, kind, loved, and unified, and making associating the proletariat with an African American man who is alienated, resentful, evil, and immune to love, these positive gifts are now associated with wealth and status. Subconsciously, the Black proletariat viewers of the film are likely to associate prosperity beyond material funds, like consistent love and support, with bougie life, which is also associated with consumption. And between incarcerated fathers and lack of societal acceptance, this is dangerous for a community that is lacking and craving in those areas. African American viewers may consume out of fear of becoming alienated like Killmonger. He

dies with just one person next to him, an enemy.

The harsh reality about fearing alienation is that it cannot be cured with consumption. Consumption can bring about the temporary illusion of being bougie with clothes, activities, access, and more surface-level attributes of the bourgeoisie. So people work hard to pay for things that will make them feel closer to the bourgeoisie. However, it will never be enough because they are truly the proletariat. But because they are living in a false consciousness, they will keep working hard to make more money, so that they can spend it to consume more (Berger, 2019, p. 68). Once the proletariat spends their money to look like the bourgeoisie, they will still feel a gap between what they want to be and who they are. In turn, they increase their spending to close the gap that will never be closed because to have money, they have to work for it. And the more exploitable labor they produce, the further they fall into the proletariat status. It is a cycle that keeps the proletariat in the same position, all while attempting to cure their dissatisfaction with their proletariat status.

However, if the white power structure in America were presented as the bourgeoisie, then internal prosperity wouldn't be so easily tied to consumerism. If the film allowed Africans and African Americans as a proletariat (which is closer to reality) to unite to fight the white power structure and real-world bourgeoisie, then happiness, empathy, and love stem would from community, not wealth. Consumerism could become associated with hate, selfishness, and despair if, say, the audience were to watch a white enslaver lynch people for money one moment, and then use that money to buy diamonds in the next. But doing so would take people out of their false consciousness, because you would have to expose the bourgeoisie's exploitative

behavior.

### **Black-on-Black Aggression**

The issue is, when you take out the real antagonist/bourgeoisie, you have to replace it with whoever is left. Wakanda hides from the outside world. The only other people who could be a real threat to Wakanda are either Wakandans or someone of Wakandan descent, like an African American Killmonger. This leads us to the portrayal of Black-on-Black aggression, and even worse, to fulfill the Hollywood happy ending, the manipulative illusion of Black-on-Black resolution.

The film presents a base: economic inequalities in the United States. When trying to justify why he betrayed Wakanda, Killmonger's father, Prince N'jobu, states, "I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities are flooded with drugs and weapons. They are over policed and incarcerated...All over the planet, our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With Vibranium weapons, they could overthrow every country" (*Black Panther*, 2018,1:05:50-1:06:02). The audience is given a legitimate diagnosis of the problem—racial inequalities. The Black community has significantly fewer financial resources than the dominant race, which the film refuses to acknowledge by name, and therefore that community needs assistance.

However, the superstructure is omitted when the film does not acknowledge the white power structure that assassinated Black leaders, flooded the communities with drugs, funded over policing, and orchestrated mass incarceration. When the oppressed are acknowledged without also acknowledging the oppressor, it is really easy to divert accountability and maintain the illusion of power. This half-truth makes

room for the idea that the oppressed group have to remain downtrodden, or they will oppress other people if empowered. Essentially, the Black-on-Black aggression is a distraction used to divert attention from the actual antagonist, the white power structure in America.

Moreover, Black-on-Black violence is a significant issue, but a problem that is just as notable is that it requires a Black-on-Black resolution. The Hollywood happy ending to *Black Panther* is the death of Killmonger, and T'Challa's arrival in Oakland, California, Killmonger's hometown. T'Challa agrees to help the community: "I bought this building, and that building, and that one over there. This will be the first Wakanda International Outreach Center" (*Black Panther*, 2018, 2:01:24-2:01:38).

By telling us that the solution is to buy this and that building, the film is acknowledging that the Black community's issues and the emergence of Killmonger are rooted in economics, not some innate instinct to overthrow the world with violence, a notion that has been reinforced time and time again in this movie. But who is providing the economic aid for the happy ending? For some reason, it's not the bourgeoisie that lives on the same continent as African Americans. Sure, the film omitted the white power structure from the downfall of West Africans and African Americans in the story world, but the film has established that the dominant culture still has more resources. That hasn't changed by the end of the movie. The people with the resources who live on the same continent aren't even asked to help.

This ending perpetuates this notion that Black people have to save themselves from oppressive systems with temporary relief, grassroots programs. Even then, the solution in the film is rescue from the bourgeoisie—the fictional one. Black people rely

on other Black people to save each other, and not through any legislative change or advocacy to fix systemic racism, but through philanthropy. The only way the people suffering in the capitalist system can avoid it is not to create fair competition, but to be wealthy enough to offer what they can to the proletariat. This is the equivalent of the idea that the happy ending to slavery isn't to build an underground railroad, it is to abolish slavery legislatively. The film's solution isn't a path for success: it's an attempt at survival.

### **Justification of Economic Disadvantages**

While the film is praised for its fresh representation of wealthy Black people, the film relies heavily on stereotypes to compensate for the lack of a white power structure. These stereotypes are, in turn, used to justify economic disadvantages for the black community.

According Hardy et al. (2022), "income inequality between Blacks and Whites stands as among the most durable group-level outcome differences in the United States...Such gaps, and the low levels of income that many Black American families are routinely exposed to, are associated with diminished socioeconomic outcomes, including lowered educational attainment, health status, and wealth" (pp. 149-150). African Americans are more likely to experience poverty, and because of the system that is in place, they are automatically at an economic disadvantage. In the film, Killmonger is gunning for vibranium to kill oppressors of Black people. Recall Killmonger's quote: "When Black folks started revolutions, they never had the firepower or the resources to fight their oppressors. Yeah, that ends today. They'll arm oppressed people all over the world, so they can finally rise up and kill those in

power, and their children, and anyone else who takes their side. It's time they know the truth about us!" (*Black Panther*, 2019, 1:29:54-1,30:36). Killmonger represents the African American community when he says, "us." And when he says, "it's time they know the truth about us," he is saying that the truth is Black people are willing to do exactly what he said, kill White people and their innocent children.

This statement reinforces negative stereotypes perpetuated by the white power structure, which people already buy into, about Black people being violent and aggressive. Dibinga (2023) mentions that Black people are often associated with violence, and media texts like this do not help: "The idea that black people are more likely to be criminals is vocalized in the media" (p. 65). Dibinga goes on to give examples of media that amplify the illusion of there being more Black crime than there is, noting that people get most of these ideas from the mass media.

This is why *Black Panther's* rhetoric can be so harmful. The story is saying that if White people allow Black people the economic resources to thrive in a capitalist society, they will use those resources to become who they "really are," which is dangerous. When Killmonger says, "when Black folks started a revolution, they never had the firepower or resources to fight their oppressors," this is saying that the only reason why the world hasn't felt the wrath of African Americans is because they never had economic resources to begin with, and if White people want to remain safe, they should keep things the way they are. The movie should have had the people who would like to steal the vibranium instead be the White supremacists who have had a history of taking from countries in West Africa, whether those were resources or people in the Transatlantic slave trade.

## Ideology

The primary ideology used to maintain hegemonic misconceptions about Black people in *Black Panther* is the notion that race is real. It is the belief that race is a natural category that extends beyond social constructs, and that Black people are inherently different from White people. In 2003, Dr. Alan Goodman, biological anthropologist, Dr. Joseph L. Graves Jr., evolutionary biologist, Dr. Evelyn Hammonds, historian of science, and Dr. Troy Duster, sociologist, came together to create the PBS three-part series, *Race: The Power of Illusion*. They challenge this belief of race as a natural category. The notion that race is natural and not historically constructed to justify economic disparities and exploitation of particular groups of people has been perpetuated by the white power structure.

This belief is rooted explicitly to the idea that Black people are not as evolved as White people, that Black people are more primitive. They are depicted as less human, more violent while athletically gifted, prone to certain diseases, and possessing a higher pain tolerance, along with many other claims throughout history to justify the exploitation and neglect of the Black community. Goodman et al. (2003) emphasize, "And if you can say that they are fundamentally biologically different, then they should be, then it's natural for them to be at the bottom of our social hierarchy...Biology becomes an excuse for social differences. The social differences become naturalized in biology. It's not that our institutions cause differences in infant mortality [for example], it's that there really are biological differences between the races" (11:56 - DVD Scene #5). Unfortunately, the underlying messages of *Black Panther* do not sufficiently counter these kinds of

dehumanizing beliefs.

The messaging of *Black Panther* reinforces such assumptions. Killmonger's entire argument is that Black people never had the resources to fight oppressors, and if they did, they would finally rise up and kill those in power, and their children, and anyone else who takes their side. While the story briefly mentions that the world is "chaotic," there is still an undisrupted peace before African Americans get their hands on vibranium. There is a homeostasis in the story world before Killmonger takes the throne, which implies a lack of excessive violence and death, while Black people are lacking in financial resources. In other words, while there is still a white power structure, everything is under control. This reinforces the pseudoscience that says African Americans are not evolved enough to handle financial power without igniting more violence in the world than White people. This is the justification for existing economic disadvantages.

The idea that Black people are different also encourages everyone, including Black people themselves, to pick a side. Stand with African Americans and become a murderer, or be noble, fight your primitive instincts, and fight against your people. Through this lens, this text goes beyond diverting attention away from the white power structure; it is also a work that divides and conquers. This is the result of depictions of Black-on-Black aggression. In the film, after allying himself with the African American community, Prince N'Jobu became thirsty for White blood. T'Chaka, the Wakandan king at the time, didn't want to participate in the death of innocent people, and ended up killing his brother because of it. Their children, T'Challa and Killmonger, would go on to battle. To make this conflict work, the film has to imply that African Americans

are innately violent and that they see no other means for progress. In the film's imagery, the oppressed are fighting against each other over the safety of innocent White people when in reality, the white power structure oppresses the African Americans, and the Wakandans are hiding their vibranium from the white power structure.

### **Conclusion**

In essence, *Black Panther* (2018) has been a cultural phenomenon in the Black community; however, the absence of a clear acknowledgement of the white supremacist power structure leads the film to instead offer up ideologies that do not support African Americans economically. In truth, *Black Panther* advocates for the reduction of financial resources for Black people, even as it promotes their excess consumerism.

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