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<u>**Participants:**</u>
Trevor Parry-Giles
Rachel Alicia Griffin
Jonathan P. Rossing

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Trevor Parry-Giles:
Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:
This is *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Today's episode of *Communication Matters* addresses a special issues of NCA's journal *Review of Communication* which focused on the 2018 Disney and Marvel film *Black Panther*. Guest co-editors Rachel Alicia Griffin and Jonathan P. Rossing join me today to discuss the film and the special issue's articles. First, a bit more about today's guest. Rachel Alicia Griffin is an associate professor of communication and adjunct associate professor of ethnic studies at the University of Utah. Dr. Griffin is a critical cultural scholar interested in black feminist thought, critical race theory, sexual violence and the social institutions of sport, media, education and the U.S. presidency. Professor Griffin has authored numerous academic journal articles and is the co-editor of the book *Adventures in Shondaland: Identity, Politics and the Power of Representations.* Jonathan P. Rossing is an associate professor and chair of communication studies at Gonzaga University. Professor Rossing studies the rhetoric of social justice particularly in relation to race and racism in the United States. Dr. Rossing examines the ways in which people use humor to provoke conversations and to provide a critical education about

race. And Professor Rossing is the author of numerous journal articles on humor and improvisation. Hi, Rachel. Hi, Jonathan. Thanks for joining us today on *Communication Matters*.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
Trevor, I am. So, thrilled to have this conversation because Jonathan and myself and the *Review of Communication* editorial team have been working on this project for over two years. Right, Jonathan?

Jonathan P. Rossing:
Yes, that's right.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
And so, the opportunity to talk about it and think about it and encourage others to talk and think about *Black Panther* especially as we head toward a sequel of the film is just delightful. I'm excited to geek out.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's great.

Jonathan P. Rossing:
Yes, thank you for having us. I'm excited too. And you mentioned our editorial team. We should shout out to Kathleen McConnell and Sohinee Roy for all of their outstanding guidance in helping us get this themed issue together too.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Good. Now before we talk about the themed issue and even the film *Black Panther*, I'd like to discuss the comic book of the same name which was created initially by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. How do you think Lee and Kirby's perspective influences the ideology of *Blank Panther* and how do those original comics compare to subsequent versions of the narrative authored by writers of color like Ta-Nehisi Coates and others? What are your thoughts on the sort of generative roots of the original comics?

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
Okay. I know that our listeners can't see right now but everyone who knows me and even those who don't can imagine that I have a look of displeasure on my face when it comes to the contextual history around the comic. So, when it comes to Lee and Kirby, I think of the same paradoxical ideation as a core narrative device that Jonathan and I outline in the introduction with respect to both the film and the comics. So, for example, on the one hand as two white U.S.

Jewish-American men, Lee and Kirby racially diversified Marvel's comics and they used their positionality and their profession to create an incredibly meaningful representation of black African masculinity. And for that, I am genuinely grateful, right? The representation of blackness, of black masculinity, of African black masculinity, it has to start somewhere. And they did do that and for that, they absolutely deserve credit, respect and admiration for creating a character that has now spanned decades.

On the other hand—here's my pleasured face—they remain beholden to dominant ideologies of whiteness that despite creating *Black Panther* amid the Civil Rights Movement no less failed to meaningful challenge white neo-colonial ideas. Let me tell you about the first time that I watched *Black Panther*. I was nervous. I'm always nervous when I watch films about black culture because I think oh gosh, what is this going to be like. And then afterwards, I felt excited and I felt pride in the film. I think that some of my emotions very much resonate with Amber Johnson's essay in our themed issue. But also like Johnson, I felt suspicious, I felt excluded and ultimately, I felt disappointed because Disney's Marvel franchise certainly has access to the resources to make a more inclusive film.

And I would also argue going all the way back to the generation of the comics in the 1960s that Lee and Kirby, they didn't have the same kind of access of course that Disney as a multi-billionaire media conglomerate has to make a more inclusive representation of blackness. But they did have resources that they didn't use, right? So, once again, mimicking Lee and Kirby, Disney sacrificed explicitly resisting stereotypes and caricatures in favor of creating a film that would appeal to their white middle to upper class consumer base. In a little bit of a different context, right?, Lee and Kirby sacrificed explicitly resisting stereotypes and caricatures in favor of creating a comic that would resonate with their predominantly—I'm not sure about class dynamics in comics in the 1960s—but they created a cultural text that would resonate with their predominantly white fan base.

So, something's that always stood out to me and I was grateful that Jonathan and I found a way to incorporate it into the introduction is the first time I read Christopher Lebron's Boston Review of the film. It was really the first moment that someone poetically and succinctly captures my concerns about the film and they're the same concerns that I have about the comic. He says that, "*Black Panther* is not the movie we deserve. Why should I accept the idea of black American disposability from a man in a suit whose name is synonymous with radical uplift but whose actions question the very notion that black lives matters." So, returning to Lee and Kirby, thinking about my experience watching the film as a person of color, thinking about everything that I've read about the film, I think that Lee and Kirby had what most white people have which is good intentions. They're also like most well-intentioned white people who are interested in

being and becoming more racially conscious, they did. So, from a stance anchored by color blindness which ironically functions in service to white supremacy and anti-black racism.

A stark example of how. So, can be found in our introduction when we deconstruct Lee's reaction to a 1969 critique of the comics in Harlem's *East Village Other*. And Lee's reaction fell incredibly short of being aware of his white privilege as someone partaking in the process of creating a representation of black African masculinity.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Jonathan, did you sense that any reaction or challenge along the lines of what Rachel was discussing may have come in subsequent versions of the comics written not from the white Jewish male perspective of Lee and Kirby but from the African-American, Afro-futurist, black perspectives of writers like Coates and others?

Jonathan P. Rossing:
Yeah. I think you asked originally about how it might have changed with Coates and I think it's significant that in Coates you had not just someone who's also part of sort of the comic book world but you have a public intellectual who's a journalist, who's a researcher, who's a MacArthur Genius Grant, National Book Award winner who is bringing to this work now also a profound sort of like intellectual research ethic that recognizes—I mean in some of his interviews he talks about his own original influences of coming to writing and coming to understand the power of the word through hip-hop and through comic books. And so, we have someone who recognizes first fundamentally, the power of popular culture as a representational and like transformative pedagogical sort of enterprise and he's bringing to that work I think in the series that he authored a really sharp lens and a really clear directive to try to change some of the what Lee and Kirby couldn't step out of. They can't step out of their whiteness and they can't necessarily step out of the racist ideologies that were informing what they were doing. Coates, he's spoken about his intentionality in doing that.

He's also spoken a lot about his intentionality for changing women's representation in comics. I think it was an NPR interview, he talked about how important it was to escape the traditional depiction of women in comics that construct them largely as just an object of desire and lust and saying no, let's portray non-objectified, real women in actual roles. And I haven't read as much about it but Nnedi Okorafor, also Afrofuturist writer, is currently working on this next *Black Panther* series I believe and I think that'll push that envelope even further I would say.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
You mentioned Afrofuturism. What is Afrofuturism?

Rachel Alicia Griffin:

First, Afrofuturism I think is a profoundly different theoretical and methodological tool than most of the critical race theories that we have in this contemporary moment. Generally speaking, I would describe Afrofuturism as a philosophy, a theory and a worldview and here I'm going to quote from Womack's *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* which is the foundational text and Womack describes Afrofuturism in really straightforward and accessible terms. She says, "It's the intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation." And so, drawing from her wisdom and the wisdom of other Afrofuturistic scholars, I think of the grammar of Afrofuturism as being deeply invested in revisionist innovation, galactic freedom and futuristic revolution.

And so, when we think about what the grammar of Afrofuturism has to lend to the representation of the storytelling of the black diasporic experience, what it does is it creates opportunities to imagine freedoms that black peoples here on Earth have never actually had. It creates an opportunity to theorize what a future could look like with black people in it in a current contemporary moment when we think about movements like Black Lives Matter that literally and tragically shows us the ways that black lives are not being allowed, are not permissible to be imagined as having futures and you can see Afrofuturism. I haven't read every single *Black Panther* comic. I just want to disclose that to the listeners. I fully align with Jonathan's interpretation of the roles that Coates and his team of writers have played and the influence they've had on rewriting the comic of *Black Panther* in a way that imagines black peoples all around the globe having a future that is a profound act of communicative resistance.

And before Coates, we can go back to Christopher Priest and if anyone doesn't know who Christopher Priest is, take a moment and feel ashamed if you're a *Black Panther* fan and don't know who Christopher Priest is. But he was hired in 1983 as the first black writer to work full time at either Marvel or DC and Priest is the writer who was absolutely pivotal to the comics genealogy when he revived *Black Panther's* really drab 1970s and 1980s story lines by reimagining T'challa. And so, the foundation that Coates and his team are working with to propel *Black Panther* even further into public consciousness was deeply impacted by Priest's reimaginings of what black African masculinity and what black American masculinity can look like. And so, while Ta-Nehisi Coates has talked about how his primary area of intellect and contribution is not Afrofuturism, he's also talked about the ways that he's brought writers into the fold who do use Afrofuturism.

And so, we can bear witness to Afrofuturist influences in *Black Panther* when, for example, king T'challa connects with his father on an ancestry plane or when *Black Panther's* suit, the assuring scientific genius renders T'challa not just a king but also a superhero with superhuman

capabilities. Likewise, we see Afrofuturism's influence when we think about neo-colonial imaginings of Africa. we can see it and underscore Afrofuturism when Wakanda is being technologically cloaked to protect and prohibit global access to its vibranium, right? And so, on the one hand, that's a very neo-colonial and I would argue politically isolationist move for Wakanda to cloak itself with technology and hide its resources. On the other hand, that vibranium is what Wakandans imagine secure their future existence in Wakanda as a safe prosperous and thriving country. And so, that's an example of how Afrofuturism reveals another paradoxical ideation built into the film.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I think that might have spurred some curiosity on, I don't know, the handful of listeners who may not have seen *Black Panther* or read the comics. Just briefly, it is the story of a fictional country in Africa called Wakanda and they have this metal called vibranium that gives them great technological advance and accomplishment. And the story basically wraps around the death of one of the kings of Wakanda and the replacement of him by his son T'challa and then challenges that T'challa faces to his rule, most particularly from Erik Stevens, Erik Killmonger Stevens whose birth name was N'Jadaka and who was T'challa's cousin. So, that all plays itself out in the movie. I don't want to get into a whole lot more detail. But I worry that we're here talking about Wakanda forever and vibranium and we might have some listeners who just haven't gotten around to seeing it. So, let's dive into the articles a little bit, into the themed issue. The first article by Godfried Asante and Gloria Nziba Pindi analyzed the transnational blackness and African diasporic solidarity portrayed in *Black Panther.* And Rachel, a minute ago, you mentioned isolationist politics and the isolationism, the neo-colonialism of the cloaking of Wakanda. What did Asante and Pindi reveal in their sense of representation and the fictional land of Wakanda's isolationist politics?

Jonathan P. Rossing:

So, overall, I think what they're doing in their essay is they're challenging how the film in its portrayal of Wakanda and quote-unquote Africa still largely sort of succumbs to Western fantasies and cinematic caricatured stereotypical cinematic representations and neo-colonial logics of how we think about Africa. And so, for example, they discuss sort of how Wakanda's isolationist policy that sort of has governed that fictional country forever, that isolation from the rest of Africa is more indicative of a Western ethnocentrism than how sort of a real contemporary African country in African society would work. And they highlight things like so, for example, one of the examples they offer in their essay is the melding of African languages into sort of a single language in the film. So, like Kosa and Swahili, Yoruba, these languages sort of like blend into one Wakandan and they challenge, they say that doesn't exactly allow viewers to explore how many Africans are multilingual. They're switching between different languages.

There's a great sort of interaction and interplay between societies, between language, between culture. And so, it sort of homogenizes this vision of again just Africa from the Western imaginary. And so, these are some of the things that they argue. Like it's not then presenting sort of a true transnational blackness that they would like to see in the film.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
And just to be clear from a global perspective, isolationist policies and practices are profoundly baked into Westernization, right? And so, what we end up with is a representation of a fictional African country that is imagined through a Western lens of isolationist politics. I want to take a moment and acknowledge African worldviews but I also want to deconstruct my use of the phrase African worldviews because Africa is a continent. It's not a country, It's a continent full of multiple African countries, multiple African what in U.S. American terms would translate into ethnicities and tribes. And so, what a predominantly black cast and crew, many of whom identify as U.S. American, many of whom identify as African, what they jointly created is a fictional imagining of an African country that utilizes Western ideology and that just doesn't make sense. That's what Asante and Pindi help us understand is that African cultural worldviews as incredibly divergent as they are from one ethnicity and/or tribe to another, overall they emphasize wholeness, community and harmony. That's what Asante and Pindi point to and Wakanda's isolationist politics and practices are completely inconsistent with African worldviews.

And so, and I also just need to say this: something that has always bothered me and this links back to Lee and Kirby as well as *Black Panther,* one of the ways that we constantly talk about Wakanda is it's constantly described as a fictional African nation. Here's a question. Why does it have to be fictional, right? Like it's fictional because we don't have a place to point to where black communities, black cultures can thrive apart from colonization from neo-colonial practices from white supremacy. And so, Jonathan and I ask a question in our introduction and I wanted to punctuate it with like 15 exclamation points which is not very appropriate in the world of scholarly writing but Jonathan and I asked why did Lee and Kirby need to create a fictionalized country over 6,000 miles from Marvel's headquarters in Manhattan, New York when Harlem, as but one example, was less than 20 miles away, right? And so, what Asante and Pindi also point to is why is it that this imagined place where black cultures and tribes thrive and feel a sense of emancipation from whiteness and have beautifully rich interpersonal and cultural experiences, why is that fictional, right? Now I'm not saying that isn't a real place, right? We know that there are so many representations of African cultures and places that tell us this is possible in the real world. But it has to be fictional in the realm of Disney and Marvel and I just deeply struggle with that.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Well, along the lines of struggling with that, there are also the struggles that several of your authors articulate over the varied representations or misrepresentations or lack of representations in *Black Panther*. So, the second article in the issue from Shadee Abdi and Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui looks at the erasures or the omissions of particular African identities including Muslim-Africans and Michaela Meyer's article looks at the depiction or lack of depiction of the relationship between two of the Dora Milaje, the special forces in Wakanda, Ayo and Aneka and their presentation as lesbians. So, what effect do these representations and these erasures and these absences and exclusions have about *Black Panther* as a film, its politics and potentially the Afrofuturistic vision of the film?

Jonathan P. Rossing:
Let me say first I think that as this themed issue came together and these essays came together, one of the things I really appreciate as we hope probably in most issues like this is how much they all speak to one another and build on one another and reinforce some of the same themes while also highlighting such unique and rich critiques of the film. And so, for example, the second essay by Abdi and Chrifi Alaoui really picks up I think where the first essay, some of the themes of the first essay. They're also concerned with the ways this film is not really transnationally astute or conscious. They're concerned with some of the ways the film glosses over the interconnectedness of the various countries and ethnic groups of the African continent. And yes, as you say, they highlight some of the erasures. So, one of the things that they bring up is the erasure of Islam and the way that participates in larger ideologies of Islamophobia.

So, on a continent where Islam is widely practiced across many countries and many ethnic groups, it's absent completely from the film other than they highlight the brief rescue scene in the beginning of the film that could be argued, as they do, reinforces a stereotypical Western imagination of the Muslim as terrorists and that's it. So, other than that, there's nothing. There's no Islam. And they argue well, the presence of Muslims in the film would have strengthened the case for the film actually telling a more transnationally conscious story but by completely taking that reality out, it misses the mark. And I think that ultimately becomes a theme. So, Rachel, you can speak a little bit about Michaela Meyer's essay. But that becomes a theme in a number of these essays and I think that's a tension that we highlight in the introduction and it drove a lot of this is on one hand, we have a film that we want to celebrate for all of its firsts, for all of its representational greatness that we don't get to see a lot of and on the flip side, there's still plenty of work that we can do and there's still plenty to critique and there's still plenty of ways that dominant logics and dominant representations take hold and take root even in a film like this that pushes us forward in certain ways and keeps us held back in others.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:

Jonathan makes such an important point by drawing our attention to one of the key contextual reasons that *Black Panther* becomes so incredibly problematic and it's because there are so few representations of black masculinity that even approach the realm of positive, humanizing, inclusive representation. So, thinking about just the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise, if we had more than one film that featured a black male protagonist, then the way that this film falls short wouldn't be as stark, right? And so, one of the reasons that we all tune in as critical, cultural, interpersonal, post-colonial scholars in these high-profile moments of what I think of as pop culture pandemonium, right? We all start clamoring toward the same film release. One of the reasons that our commentary is so sharp and so relevant is because we have so little to choose from. If Marvel wouldn't have waited, I don't know, decades to make a film that featured a black male superhero, then perhaps we wouldn't have these kinds of issues around inclusion and exclusion.

And so, here's where I turn to along the same theme for our listeners of inclusion and exclusion. One of the ways that Meyer and Johnson's essays in the themed issue speak to and with each other like Jonathan mentioned is by their joint focus on queer erasure. And so, Meyer makes this argument as a queer white scholar incredibly concerned about the ways that *Black Panther's* heteropatriarchy and homophobia mimic the exclusionary trends across media whereas Johnson makes this argument as a queer scholar of color looking for representations of who they are in the film and then being disappointed because they didn't find it. The Marvel Cinematic Universe for better and worse is an exorbitantly popular and accessible franchise, right? Even more so now that we have Disney Plus and through its representation and storytelling, Marvel teaches audiences about who matters and who doesn't matter.

There's another cultural studies concept called public pedagogy it comes out of the work of Giroux and Sandlin that is useful here. Public pedagogy refers to the idea that audiences learn lessons when we engage with and deconstruct popular culture. Even when we're reclined on the couch with our feet up, drinking our hot tea or coffee or beer or whatnot, we're still learning. And so, applying the concept of public pedagogy to *Black Panther,* I fully align with Johnson and Meyer's argument that the film is heterosexist and homophobic and that constrains the film's Afrofuturistic potential and promise because what we learn unfortunately is that only some black people are worthy of inclusion while other black people, queer black people, remain on the margins of the margins. It's just one more way that Disney with all of its corporate resources could have done better and they specifically chose not to, right? It's not accidental that queer narratives aren't included. It's purposeful.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
One of the articles looks at the psychological effects of all of this on a group of teenagers watching the film and that would speak I think to the point that Rachel is making here about public pedagogy and the influences that these have. Allende González-Velázquez, et. al., I'm not going to go through all of the authors here but there are many and they all deserve our credit but they examine the psychological effects of watching this movie for some racially diverse teenagers which adds another dimension to their work. What did their findings reveal? What are some of their findings that might be of interest here?

Jonathan P. Rossing:
So, their study looked at a sample of teenagers, predominantly African-American, Hispanic and Asian teenagers, to study how they reacted to the film, how strongly they identified with characters in the film, specifically T'challa as the film's hero and also they looked a little bit at identification with Erik Killmonger-Stevens as the anti-hero of the film. And they were interested in how sort of identification with characters and watching representation of these characters was related to a sense of empowerment and well-being. To build on the idea of public pedagogy but also then identity development and sort of how these come together, they were really interested in studying adolescents because of that developmental stage. It's a time when we as individuals are actively in the process of coming into understanding and constructing our identities and from the public pedagogy perspective, we know that so much of that identity, shaping and construction and self-understanding is coming from the images and stories and narratives that we see ourselves in or don't.

And so, what they found and this was a sort of preliminary study, they point—I think one of the things I also like about the article—is they point to like the places that we need to keep doing this and we need to keep interviewing and studying audiences of color and what more positive representations in media and popular culture would mean to audiences of color. But in this particular study, they found that viewing *Black Panther* increased a sense of empowerment but not well-being in their overall sample. But they also dug into sort of the different African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic populations and saw that the film had a positive effect on a sense of well-being for actually only eight African-American and Asian-American participants specifically and that the film had a positive effect on a sense of empowerment that was significant for African-American participants only. And they tease out some of the implications of this but again also point to the need for more studies that focus in on representations of, narratives from people of color and how audiences of color react to that.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
And just I think to underscore one of the areas in great need of scholarship in our discipline is audience research, right? And so, when we think about the ways, when we kind of look across media scholarship in our field, we have a lot of really meaningful including my work, some of Jonathan's work, textual deconstructions. We have a lot of really meaningful critiques of political economy but we don't have a great deal of audience research. And then within that that realm, we definitely don't have a great deal of audience research that focuses on audiences of color. And there are scholars in our field, like I'm thinking about Catherine Squires' *African-Americans and the Media* who have been calling for more audience research for years and one of the ways that that can happen if our discipline chooses to make it happen is that audience research is hardcore qualitative inquiry and it takes a lot of time. It requires funding for focus group participants, transcription. And so, I just want to underscore how valuable of a contribution that particular essay makes because that kind of work is so rare in our field.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I think that's right. I think you're absolutely right and I remember back as a student being introduced to cultural studies and all of that back in the 80s, back in the 80s and early 90s, that that was a concern then and there were precious few examples of really deep dives into what audiences see in texts and characters and that sort of thing. That's really interesting. Now what these audiences see about T'challa and Killmonger and the conflict there, returning back to that relationship, do we get a revised sense of Afrofuturism from *Black Panther* as a function of the limitations that are put on Killmonger's experience, for example?

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
As a critical cultural scholar who has written a great deal about the representations of black masculinity, this won't surprise anyone who's read my work that I am incredibly frustrated by the representation between Killmonger and T'challa and Jonathan tapped right into it when he framed T'challa as the protagonist, Killmonger as the antagonist or T'challa as the hero and Killmonger as the anti-hero. And initially, one of my discomforts in watching the film for the first time when I realized that Killmonger was going to die is why can't we have two black men who strengthen each other, who bond across their differences, who pool their strengths to advocate for their joint commitments. And so, I was just incredibly frustrated that one black man had to die for another black man to succeed. But really it's not just Killmonger because part of the narrative crux of the film, one of Killmonger's driving motivations is trying to right the wrong of his father's murder and his father was killed by T'challa's father. And so, really what you have is two generations of black men in one family who can't get along and for those of us that identify as black and for those of us that have black families, we know that the relationships between black

men, they are not primarily nor do they need to be primarily represented as being in a constant state of conflict.

And so, to use one black man's motivations to protect Wakanda, to justify the reason as why another black man needs to die twice over across two generations is—okay, I'm looking for a word that's not profane. It's ridiculous, right? So, the central conflict between Killmonger and T'challa is over power, how to use power, how to leverage power. Another aspect of their central conflict is over what a black liberation politics of existence looks like and whether or not that can be or should be global, right? Because remember T'challa is taking, he's mirroring I would argue the mistake that his father made and assuming that Wakanda must remain technologically cloaked to protect itself. And so, really what we have in Wakanda isn't a black global liberation. We have a liberation for Wakandans and Killmonger's perspective as a U.S. American black male who's also Wakandan is that Wakanda in a nutshell should use its vibranium to free black people all over the world, right?

And so, the idea that these two black men with all of their strengths, their intellect, their gifts and their talents and their differences can't come together and learn from the mistakes that their fathers made. I understand why in the Marvel Cinematic Universe it's appealing and sexy for lack of a better term but it also just leans so profoundly into the caricature of angry black men who are dangerous to not only themselves but also each other. So, I'm sure Felicia knows this. I'm just nodding read her essay like absolutely in terms of critiquing that representation.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I don't know you. I was also struck too by the fact that when T'challa condemns his father for the act that led to all of these problems. He doesn't condemn him for the fratricide of killing his brother. He condemns him for leaving the kid behind, right? And it strikes me that feeds right into what you're talking about. There's all this conflict and all this death and all this misplaced sort of anxiety about what really went wrong here and that's fascinating.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
Anyone who's read my essay on *The Help* knows how I feel about it. *The Help* is about the redemption of racist white women. It has nothing to do with the black women that it's named after. Take a moment and if you've seen *The Help* or perhaps Google the end and you've got Miss Aibileen walking down a sunny tree-lined street dreaming of becoming a writer. To be clear, she is unemployed, she has no income and we're talking about 1960s.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Jackson, Mississippi.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
Civil rights struggles, Jackson, Mississippi. And I'm telling you, as a biracial black and white woman, I literally again, here comes the profanity, I'm watching the film for the first time. I'm like where the fuck is she going? Where is she going and what resources does she have to accomplish these wonderful dreams that she's articulating on a tree-lined street? So, let's all have a moment and think about the end of *Black Panther,* right? And so, T'challa has a reckoning of sorts with Killmonger's vision for black liberation and the best thing that Disney could come up with is one cultural center in Oakland County, California, right? One culture— okay, what does one cultural center in Oakland, California do to foster a global politics of black liberation? Does that—can I imagine that that one cultural center being led by Shuri's technological and scientific brilliance will change the lives of some children of color in Oakland, California? It doesn't do anything to really breathe life and sustenance into the vision that both Killmonger and his father had for what a global politic of black liberation could look like.

And so, here I want to draw, I want to pull a thread through the ways that that final scene in *The Help* is represented as though black culture as a whole is going somewhere through Miss Aibileen's dreams. Pull that thread to *Black Panther,* this idea that's perpetuated that black liberation is going to happen because there's one cultural center in Oakland, California. And now let's pull a bigger thread and think about the ways that many of us perhaps thought that the nature of race relations in the United States and efforts toward racial consciousness and anti-racism would somehow bloom because one black man was elected President of this country. And yet, I don't need to say much about race relations in the United States in this cultural moment because here we are, right? And so, these filmic representations, they simply encourage viewers through their public pedagogy to have a sense of what I think of as falsified hope for promises that have not yet been fulfilled in the real world.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Jonathan, do you have any other takeaways from the special issue?

Jonathan P. Rossing:
I was just going to draw out the other essay we haven't mentioned about the politics of aid and international aid because also, Rachel, what you were just highlighting there, I mean the final solution of oh, great, the one cultural outreach center in Oakland. I think while that's not the example used in that essay highlights the remaining essay that we haven't really dug into but about the ways that while the movie has again glimmers of starting to challenge sort of logics of aid and the colonial logics of aid and starts de-linking aid from those ways of thinking, it still very much reinforces those same dominant ideologies of how we think about aid to other countries,

aid to communities that are rendered in need of support, how it continues to position this last essay and a couple of them sort of suggest that ultimately, Wakanda moves closer to the white savior narrative than in the ways that the simple solution is just again, like that outreach center in Oakland, for example, rather than actually imagining what an Afrofuturist politics of aid could actually look like.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Well, and I think your highlighting of Jenna Hanchey's article is important there because it speaks to what this special issue offers. I think you're tackling a lot of issues here beyond simply a Disney Marvel movie from 2018. You've got representation, you've got gender, you've got identities, you've got audience engagement, you've got post-colonialism, you've got neo-liberalism, all of these things wrapped up into one and I think we owe all of you, especially Rachel and Jonathan but all of your authors, a great deal of credit for coming up with this special issue in *Review of Communication.* And I want to thank you both for joining me today on *Communication Matters* and talking about that special issue. Rachel and Jonathan, it's been a real pleasure. It's been a lot of fun. So, thanks for joining me.

Jonathan P. Rossing:
Thanks for having us. It's been a lovely conversation to talk about this work.

Rachel Alicia Griffin:
Yeah. I'm so grateful for this themed issue because at the end of the day, what it helps us understand is that *Black Panther* isn't perfect and I think that's a really important lesson to take away so that we are always in progress toward really rigorously engaging with black cultural productions and asking hard questions because they're worthy of that kind of serious consideration. I'm grateful for the space.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Absolutely. And I think our listeners will be grateful when they actually access this now free-to-access issue that is publicly available of the *Review of Communication* and you can find a link to it on the NCA podcast page at natcom.org/podcast. So, thanks listeners for joining us again on another episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*.

In NCA news, in response to national conversations about systemic racism, NCA has developed a resource bank that provides information about racism in America and offers guidance for allies and people of color in the anti-racism movement. These resources include information on organizations committed to anti-racism work, mass media and both academic and professional articles covering topics such as identifying and addressing racism, advocacy work and

dialoguing about racism and anti-racism in the classroom. This is a living resource and will be updated as additional materials are identified. Visit natcom.org/Anti-Racism-Resources to view the NCA Anti-Racism Resource Bank. That's natcom.org/Anti-Racism-Resources for the NCA Anti-Racism Resource Bank.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:
Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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