

More Than Movies: Reconceptualizing Race in *Black Panther* and *Get Out*

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In a 2018 interview, the star cast member of *Black Panther* (2018), Chadwick Boseman, declared of the movie that “People are thirsty for it, that’s what you’re witnessing now” (Coyle). Apart from highlighting the desperation for the movie itself, Boseman directs attention to the situational significance of the movie’s production and reception.¹ Jordan Peele, the director of *Get Out* (2017), similarly highlights such significance by drawing attention to the socio-cultural background of the movie. In an interview with Brooke Marine, Peele discusses his movie as contributing to the discourse on racial politics. He concludes that now more than ever, “voices that call out those in power are really needed and really valued” (27). Both *Black Panther* and *Get Out* offer contrasting frameworks that engage with ongoing questions of Black subjectivity, performance, and racial politics. In the process, they bring viewers closer to an understanding of re-imagined race relations.

Ultimately, each film portrays a conscious attempt at contextualizing Blackness as either empowerment or a veiled site of continuous struggle through fantasy and horror genres. In doing so, both films are historically motivated as much as they look forward to creating new paradigms to help understand the contemporary experiences of racialization and systemic forms of subjugation. By drawing attention to ongoing ideologies of race, the films offer parallel evidence from discourses on racial identity, practice, and politics.

¹ As far as its release is considered, the timing could be no more opportune. In the context of the 2013 Black Lives Matter movement, the Charlottesville rally of August 2017, and the January 2018 report of President Donald Trump allegedly using the word “shithole” to describe African nations, I argue that *Black Panther* can be read as an ideologically charged affirmation of Black pride.

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This paper examines the important role of mass media in focusing the spotlight on Black subjectivity and the ways in which Blackness is celebrated and re-conditioned in *Black Panther*. In *Get Out*, the myth of a post-racial America is critiqued for the disguised form of racial hegemony being re-imposed. Intentionally or not, the messages expressed by the movies impact Black consciousness and influence the ways in which Black culture is perceived by the society as a whole. Thus, both directors highlight the ability of film to both maintain and establish ideology by providing insight to the world about people, things, and events. At the center of *Black Panther* is the ideological and historical reworking of African-ness. *Get Out* rides a similar wave of cultural momentum to raise unresolved issues of the appropriation of Blackness, on the one hand, and white supremacy on the other. Whereas *Black Panther* reconceptualizes African histories as undetermined by the transatlantic slave trade, *Get Out* directs attention to new forms of enslavement of the Black body that are subtly enacted through the over-compensation of Blackness as something enviable. In each movie, the representations of Black subjectivity act as a counter-narrative to the ideological and historical constructions of Blackness by challenging whiteness, depicting connections between past and present racisms, and transforming ideology to promote conceptual change.

Black Panther provides a way of examining how Afro-futurism can create a condition which exposes the nature of socially constructed racial hierarchies. It expresses how Black cultural producers, such as Ryan Coogler, expose hierarchies by going beyond binaries and into the realm of unique performances of monstrosity. In *Black Panther*, the enactment of Afro-futurism occurs in the fictional country of Wakanda, whereas *Get Out* exaggerates the monstrous alongside a cult of transmutation. D. Scot Miller's distinction between Afro-futurism and Afro-surrealism is exemplified in *Black Panther*, which, according to Miller, "turns to science, technology, and science fiction to speculate on black possibilities" (114), demonstrating Afro-futurism, while *Get Out*, to use Miller's description of Afro-surrealism, "restore[s] the cult of the past" and "revisit[s] old ways with new eyes" (116). Through this radical version of modern enslavement, Peele provokes a renewed cultural discourse of racism and white supremacy. Each director's perspective of Black subjectivity responds to the social awareness of the status of Blackness, and in the process becomes a bearer of socio-cultural, historical, and political phenomena. The presentation of Black subjectivities in both films involves a condition where the already Othered Black body takes on strategies of subversion to create fantastical and humorous experiences of observing and being observed.

The film study approach as well the discourse analysis of this paper offer discussions on how to think differently about racial constructs in a supposedly post-racial world.

Black Panther Matters

Black Panther represents not only a cultural shift for Marvel Studios but also, more significantly, a celebration of its re-presentations of Africa and African culture as dynamic, heterogeneous, and dominant. Set in the fictional kingdom of Wakanda — the location of which is generally accepted to be in East Africa — depicts a young prince, T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), who was raised in Wakanda. T'Challa's rite of passage to kingship entails an assertion of Wakanda's sovereignty and individuality as well as an ushering of Wakanda into the global community, where its resources are not hoarded but extended to countries in need. He begins his leadership, however, by retaining his predecessor's policy of isolation. When his cousin, Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan), who was raised in the United States of America, returns to Wakanda and challenges T'Challa for the throne, the rivalry is layered by ideological differences that both men envision for Wakanda.

Through the conflict between both men, *Black Panther* attempts to show that Africa's main antagonist has historically been, and continues to be, a problem of leadership from within. Killmonger's aspirations attempt to isolate Wakanda from the rest of the world. The micro-conflict between both men, made all the more tense because they each embody a particular value-system, is compounded by the macro-conflict of the direction each of the men envision for Wakanda. As T'Challa explains, Wakanda has isolated itself from the rest of the world because of the fear of exploitation: "If the world found out what we truly are, what we possess, we could lose our way of life" (00:34:15-00:34:21). Wakanda has resisted colonization because it has kept its secrets hidden. Though T'Challa and the ruling family consider this isolationism to be a success for the Wakandan people, for Killmonger it is a problem because Wakanda has isolated itself even from those of the Black diaspora.

Different versions of Wakanda's future become the source of conflict between members of the new generation of would-be Wakandan leaders. On the one hand, T'Challa is burdened by the tradition of keeping Wakanda safe by keeping its secrets. On the other hand, Killmonger stands for a break with tradition and a radicalized view of Africa's place in the global order. Their differing perspectives

correspond to what each character represents. According to director Ryan Coogler in his interview with David Betancourt, T'Challa represents "an African that hasn't been affected by colonization," untainted by the uprooting, trauma, and erasure. Killmonger, however, is the antithesis to T'Challa. He is the colonized, Americanized, recriminatory subject burdened by unresolved familial conflict. As a symbol of victimization that has mutated into vengeance, Killmonger is a disturbingly sympathetic character. His intention of a liberated, global Black community is complicated by his tyrannical method, which ultimately succumbs to the democratic and traditional philosophy of Wakanda. Thus, *Black Panther* re-writes the narrative of an African state tainted by poor leadership. The movie is much more than a superhero film because it highlights the struggle of a nation to deal with the threat of domination posed by internal as much as external forces.

With the focus on conflict between Wakandans fighting for their future, both place and people are imbued with an Afrocentric emphasis which grounds the movie's challenge to racialized discourses of Black inferiority and primitiveness. This Afrocentric representation occurs through identification with African visual and vernacular culture and the institutional significance of the mantra "Wakanda Forever."² As a fictional ideal, the integration of the uniquely Afro-polis that is Wakanda signifies for the community a depiction of an ancestral land. More than this, the movie draws parallels between Wakanda and America in order to re-signify the former as a site of power and the latter as a place of cultural loss. In the opening scene of *Black Panther*, the historical account of Wakanda's rise to prominence is expressed akin to the griot tradition of West Africa. This is followed by a scene of boys playing basketball in Oakland, California. The wealth and advancement of Wakanda is immediately contrasted with the poverty of the basketball nets replaced by wooden boards and hollowed-out crates. The setting of this scene is significant because the revolutionary Black Panther Party originated in Oakland with the intention of defending police injustice and other manifestations of discrimination against African Americans.

These opening scenes set the tone of the entire movie when stereotypes concerning the expected metropolitan center and less developed periphery are overturned. Another example of this overturning of stereotypes occurs in the superimposition of the boys playing basketball while the Wakandan spaceship

² *Get Out* also frames issues of African subjectivity through the manifestation of identity, ideology, and institution, though from the perspective of White hegemony. This will be revisited in the second part of this paper.

hovers above the Oakland apartment building. The simplicity of children playing in an American city is overlaid by the superiority of African technology. Inside the apartment, the scene moves from televised L.A. riots of a Black man surrounded by police officers, then to assault rifles and blueprints. As the story progresses, viewers get a sense of a different revolution taking place, one that threatens Wakanda and its values. Introduced in this scene is the nature of threats posed to Wakanda by its own African diaspora. It foreshadows Killmonger, who personifies the sympathetic rage of being a Wakandan who was cut off from the motherland. His internal conflict, which stems from being alienated, matches the internal threat to which Wakanda is susceptible because it has closed its borders to the African diaspora out of fear of being exploited for its resources.

By embedding a story of a place that has retained its indigeneity, *Black Panther* addresses the historical narrative of the continent as a depraved land and further speculates on a possible what-if it had not been colonized. As Lupita Nyong'o discusses in an interview, "Wakanda is special because it was never colonized, so what we can see there for all of us is a re-imagining of what would have been possible had Africa been allowed to realize itself for itself" (*The View* 00:03:39-00:03:52). The movie resists the historical narrative of an African continent being exploited by paradoxically relying on the guise of an impoverished place. Wakanda, which poses as a Third World Country in order to protect its resources from invasion by would-be poachers, such as Ulysses Klaw (Andy Serkis), is exposed to the rest of the world through CIA operative Everett Ross (Martin Freeman), who is tasked with arresting Klaw. When Klaw is captured and interrogated, his conversation with agent Ross reveals the mysticism and mystery that shrouds Wakanda's self-alienation from the world:

Klaw: "Do you actually know about Wakanda?"

Ross: "It's a Third-World country. Textiles, shepherds, cool outfits."

Klaw: "All a front. Explorers have searched for it, called it 'El Dorado.'

They looked for it in South America, but it was in Africa the whole time."

(00.56:03-00.56:24)

Stereotypes of an underdeveloped nation coupled with undermining the significance of their traditions converge in Ross's perspective of Wakanda.

However, as Klaw calls attention to what lies beneath the façade of Wakanda's Third-World guise, a reconsideration of Africa as having a critical role in supporting the world exists. For Klaw, Wakanda holds the technological and social secrets for a progressive and affluent civilization. The likening of Wakanda to El

Dorado reinforces the threat posed by poachers such as Klaw. He is the modern-day conquistador stealing and reselling vibranium, which is indigenous to Wakanda and the basis for its technological advancement. Klaw's desire to invade Wakanda to extract its vibranium contains an embedded narrative that parallels the transatlantic West African slave trade. His unsuccessful attempt to obtain the vibranium, however, implies a consolidation of the continent's ability to defend itself against self-serving intruders.

Juxtaposed to Klaw's contemptuous view of Wakanda is the way Agent Ross enters the continent. After being wounded in Klaw's escape from capture, Ross is taken to Wakanda for treatment. He has to rely on their superior science and medicine for his survival. Although he plays the role of a 'good guy,' it is not enough to warrant Shuri's (Letitia Wright) reaction when he unexpectedly creeps up behind her. She cries out, "Don't scare me like that, colonizer" (01:09:27) It evokes humor as much as it does the looming realization of an ever-present specter of white superiority. Another instance of this is found when Ross attempts to speak to M'Baku (Winston Duke), the leader of the Jabari tribe. It draws fierce howling from M'Baku and the rest of his tribe as a means of intimidation and a signal that those like Ross — a white man — are not allowed to speak out of turn.

Then there is the setting of the museum in Great Britain, an establishment that takes pride in the ownership and curating of African artifacts. Killmonger is introduced for the first time in the movie here and delivers a condemnation of British exploitation of Wakandans, and by symbolic extension, Africans. After correcting a white, British museum curator's inaccuracy of the date and origins of one of the artifacts, he says to her, "How do you think your ancestors got these? Do you think they paid a fair price? Or did they take it...like they took everything else?" (00.16:38-00.16:43). In Casey Haughin's view, "The museum is presented as an illegal mechanism of colonialism, and, along with that, a space which does not even welcome those whose culture it displays." Though shot at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the setting is meant to represent the British Museum, which, by extension, symbolizes the influence of the British Empire in curating African civilization. As discussed by Kevin Coffee in his essay on the ways in which museums reproduce narratives of inclusion and exclusion, the museum scene in *Black Panther* functions to maintain the ideology of a social and global status quo based on racial differences. A sense of justice occurs, therefore, when Killmonger steals" — that is to say, reclaims — the Wakandan artifacts from the museum because Wakanda never belonged to the British Empire. Similarly, Klaw's

death adds to the justice dealt to would-be intruders. Though Ross is the only white character who is able to see Wakanda, the movie makes it clear that he is only allowed to do so by the generosity of T'Challa, who in this moment relinquishes resentment and vindictiveness for the "colonizer."

The final scene of the movie extends T'Challa's generosity as a leader. He is seen addressing the United Nations and offering aid to those in need, which is a telling display of national strength and diplomacy from a country that is intended to represent a utopian version of Africa, had it not been stripped of its physical and human resources. Where Mark Dery asks the question, "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?" (190), *Black Panther* answers with a reverential "yes." Costuming, screenplay, and soundtrack — for the most part — bear witness to the movie attempting to re-trace an Afrocentric history. In doing so, the movie substantiates the argument made by Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Hall's claim that "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write — the positions of *enunciation*" (222; emphasis in original). Enunciation, in Hall's mind, refers to the conscious direction that Black diasporic writers are taking in their attempt to overturn stereotypes of cultural inferiority.

This conscious attempt is exemplified in *Black Panther* through Coogler's vision of Africa as a dominant global superpower and not a Third World cluster of undeveloped nations. *Black Panther* shifts the position of enunciation away from the colonizer and toward the previously colonized. Therefore, when Killmonger says, "Bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from ships, 'cause they knew death was better than bondage" (01:57:54-01:58:08) he aligns himself to a position of power through resisting enslavement. Choosing one's fate is significant because it emphasizes agency, and slavery took agency away. Whereas bell hooks argues that white supremacy has historically framed the Black experience,³ *Black Panther* re-writes this narrative, in the process denying the systematic domination of one group over another. It does this through what Michael D. Harris discusses as "spectacular images that extol the place of Black people" (ix). Such spectacular images in the movie take the form of spaceships, magical elixirs, and a spiritual otherworld which re-connect with a severed pan-African movement.

³ According to hooks, "Opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of Black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy" (1).

The imagination of an un-colonized African continent with the capacity to be a global superpower has made it possible for directors such as Coogler to examine how power can be re-negotiated and re-configured. In the movie, the symbols of African pride — costumes, chants, music, and language — become infused with the technological advancements enabled by the vibranium. They serve as tools through which African culture is demystified and re-considered in radically different ways that are not determined by racial phenotypes. Wakanda's scientific progress legitimizes the presence of the historically disenfranchised African subjects because they use it to resist domination. It corresponds to the “re-functioning of technology” discussed by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross which, above all else, is used as a strategy to “combat the monolithic picture of the one-way flow of Western technoculture” (x). In *Black Panther*, the uses of technology are culturally inspired, such as with the Royal Talon (T'Challa's personal aircraft), the Talon Fighter (armed fighter jets), mechanized rhinos (representative of the white rhinoceros), and Nakia's (Lupita Nyong'o) ring blades, which reflect the lip plate of the Mursi culture.

The brand of Afro-futurism enacted by *Black Panther* is used to confront and counter hegemonic discourses of Africa as a poor, backward, and deficient continent. Its socio-political subtexts, mediated through the emphasis on technoculture, parallels the relations among countries as much as those between races. Through science-fictional tropes of a technologically advanced society, super-capable humans, and an ideology of the otherworld rooted in Afro-spirituality, *Black Panther* re-works past histories and present contingencies by offering future possibilities. Operating as a place as much as a symbol of the people, Wakanda is a historical model where past, present, and future conceptions of Black culture intersect. As Ruth Mayer argues, “the fantasy space in-between” (556) is often used to explore the treatment of race in Black American culture. *Black Panther* represents this fantasy space most notably through Wakanda, whose veiled presence safeguards against foreign invasion. As a re-invented African polis, Wakanda contains a milieu of aesthetic expressions that transform racial dynamics as well as viewers' understanding of the ways in which they have been historically and technologically altered. T'Challa's address to the UN, in which he implores the council “to look after one another as if we were one single tribe,” (02:06:21-02:06:28) extends the importance of an African presence in the world from a passive receptor to an active enforcer of global change.

Get Out and the New Racism

Whereas *Black Panther* relies on the Afro-futurist trope to speculate a re-imagined African significance, *Get Out* uses what D. Scot Miller identifies as Afro-surrealism: a contemporary speculation of the present (114). Director Peele interweaves social criticism with a disturbingly relatable story of Black subjugation that uses scientific implausibility to reimagine the cause for continuing systems of racial exploitation. With crucial scenes in the movie inspired by actual events, such as the 2012 murder of teenager Trayvon Martin,⁴ and the slogan “A mind is a terrible thing to waste,”⁵ the entertainment value is enriched by the social criticism dramatized in the movie. To emphasize the critique of ongoing systems of racialization which continue to disempower the Black subject, *Get Out* utilizes the horror genre to depict the haunting specter of race relations.

Along with the horrific portrayal of owning the Black body, the movie incorporates symbolism, satire, and socio-historical warping of Blackness to expose the façade of color blindness. Through a narrative of mutated race relations, *Get Out* allows viewers a new perspective of the ways in which race continues to play an instrumental role in deciding who and what is considered valuable. The procedure of altering the Black body is the movie’s underlying horror story and the focus of this section’s exploration of Afro-surreal racial relations. In the movie, Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) travels with his girlfriend Rose Armitage (Allison Williams) to meet her parents. The events that unfold reveal a chilling secret that the Armitage family attempts to keep. The Armitage family runs a cult organization referred to as the Order of the Coagula. This organization kidnaps, brainwashes, and sells Black bodies to be used as vessels for the housing of the consciousness of the white buyers. The theme of exploitation of the Black body draws attention to a broader issue of a contemporary vision of a blind racism highlighted by the movie.

⁴ The opening scene, where the character Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield) is kidnapped, evokes the murder of Trayvon Martin, who was shot in suburban Florida. Martin’s murder reinvigorated the national dialogue on racially stereotyping Blacks as criminals. In an interview by Jason Zinoman, Peele discusses the opening scene as being inspired by Martin’s death as well as the larger Black Lives Matter movement.

⁵ The slogan was used by the United Negro College Fund, which was founded in 1944 with the specific purpose of providing scholarships for Black students. The irony of using the slogan, however, is that it is used to refer to the mind of the infirm white person, not the Black.

The opening succession of aural and visual scenes in the movie introduce the film's focus on acts of violence against the Black community. The movie begins when a Black character, Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield), is kidnapped and taken into a white car. The videographic miscegenation of juxtaposed black and white images is reinforced by the subsequent scenes of black and white photographs and then the image of Chris Washington, the Black protagonist, applying shaving cream. The succession of these opening scenes occurs against the background refrain of "stay woke" of Childish Gambino's song "Red Bone." The socio-cultural reference of the phrase "stay woke" is an admonition always to be conscious of white injustice. It foreshadows Chris's initial insecurity when he learns that Rose did not mention his being Black to her parents. The ever-present implication of race being significant to social interaction re-appears in the scene involving the deer. As Chris and Allison make their way to her parents, they hit a deer with their car. When they call the police, the white officer asks Chris for his identification, even though he was not the one driving. The nature of police discrimination against Black people is highlighted here as well as the white privilege shown when Rose demands that Chris not show his identification. It also serves as a marker of disempowerment for the Black character because he is made dependent on his white girlfriend.

The casual treatment of the dead deer reflects the casual usage of Black bodies in the movie. Just as the father, Dean Armitage (Bradley Whitford), later reacts to deer as vermin to be eradicated, so too is Black consciousness treated as a pest that contaminates its only thing of worth: the Black body. In the same way that the father collects the heads of deer to display as trophies, so too are Black bodies hunted, hollowed of their consciousness, and collected. Like the deer's head proudly displayed in the Armitage house, Chris becomes something to collect. As with the curator of the museum in *Black Panther*, the theme of commodification is taken one step further in *Get Out*, where bodies, not items, are the objects sought for possession. Following this is the name Armitage, which bears an eerie resemblance to La Amistad, the nineteenth century slave ship. Like La Amistad, The Armitage family engages in their own albeit modern-day practice of a particular type of chattel slavery. They lure people of African descent, brainwash them, and sell them off to the highest bidder. In the movie, the Black body is considered to be a trophy and the basis for the social critique of racism enacted throughout the interactions between the white characters. It is the reason for Chris being imprisoned both psychologically and physically.

If bodies signify meaning through feeling, movement, and contact, then *Get Out* focuses on a reconceptualization of the body based on the re-negotiation of Blackness as something to be traded and used for the survival of the white characters. As such, the Black body is a contradictory site of subjugation for the Black individual, but a source of perpetuity for the white character. As the blind curator Jim Hudson (Stephen Root), who wins the bid for Chris's body, explains to Chris after the latter is strapped to the chair, the process of coagulation occurs in three phases. Beginning with hypnosis, the method that fuels the madness, the Black body is severed from the mind, or is "how they sedate you," (01:23:14-01:23:16) according to Jim. The schism creates a void whereby control of the sensory-motor functions are taken away from the Black person and given to the white person. In the same way that West African enslavement first denied the West Africans their "self" — their rights, subjectivity, and humanity — as part of the process of exerting control, Chris undergoes a similar stripping of his individualism: memories, emotions, cognition, and perception as part of his coercion. The act of being hypnotized takes on the disguise of a modern-day process of erasure and mental enslavement. Missy Armitage (Catherine Keener) is responsible for hypnotizing the captured African Americans. Her method of hypnosis relegates the consciousness of the captives to what she calls the "sunken place," a void where the dispensable mind is locked away.

Hypnotism is used to possess the Black mind, such as with the character Andre Hayworth. He is deprived of his Black identity and, in its place, adopts the markers of conformity to his white "owners": the top hat, jacket, and speech patterns. When Andre's body becomes possessed by a White buyer, his clothing reflects the taste of the buyer because he has now lost control of his ability to make decisions. According to Carter Woodson, "When you control a man's thinking[,] you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it" (xiii). In addition to being under control of the white characters, the movie's gentrification of the Black body also takes place with Georgina (Betty Gabriel) and Walter (Marcus Henderson).⁶ Besides Chris, Georgina and Walter are the only other Black characters who live in the plantation-like household. They function as slaves who must know their places: the kitchen and courtyard, respectively. As we later find out, Georgina and Walter

⁶ This is similar to the gentrification of the mind, discussed by Sarah Schulman, which is "an internal replacement that alienated people from the concrete process of social and artistic change" (14).

are actually the host bodies for Roman Armitage (Richard Herd), Dean's father, and Marianne Armitage (uncredited), the founders of the Order of the Coagula. In order to maintain the ruse of having Black employees, Georgina works as the maid and Walter the groundskeeper. In this way they fulfill the stereotypical roles contingent on their sex as much as their race. Through hypnotism, the Black body is rendered a shell, with the mind being relegated to the sunken place. As Jim explains, in this empty space the subject's existence "will be as a passenger, an audience" (01:24:03-01:24:12). Ownership of the Black body is transferred to the white parasite, which invades the host and assumes primary control.

The sunken place is the movie's overarching symbol to express the marginalization of Black people. Peele describes the sunken place in an interview with the *LA Times* as a "metaphor for the system that is suppressing the freedom of Black people, of many outsiders, many minorities." This structural silencing of subjectivity alienates Black individuals from themselves in *Get Out*. The dark nothingness of the sunken place mirrors the physical marker of being Black. Both are also considered empty voids, with the Black person's mind sent to the sunken place and their body filled with the white person's consciousness. The appropriation of the Black body by the white characters highlights Peele's conception of a white-washing process. Another instance of white-washing comes when Chris is strapped to the chair and forced to watch the television screen. Peele goes to explain that the sunken place functions as a "prison-industrial complex," which magnifies "the lack of representation of Black people in film, in genre." He is bombarded by white characters who determine the parameters of his existence as part of a deliberate attempt to impinge on his individuality.

Part of the method of the Order of the Coagula involves brainwashing the captured Black characters. This is achieved by locking them in a room, strapping them to a chair facing the television, and stripping away their consciousness through repeated sequences of on-screen hypnotism. The imprisonment of their body allows the hypnotism to lock away their mind. Apart from operating as a medium for Missy to hypnotize the captives, the television functions as a symbol for the lack of representation Peele goes on to discuss in the interview with the *L.A. Times*. Peele draws attention to the issue of representation of Black people in film by creatively exploring the process of erasing the Black presence on screen. He says, "no matter how hard he [Chris] screams at the screen he can't get agency across. He's not represented." Both *Get Out* and *Black Panther* ultimately work to create greater representations of the Black presence on screen. However, *Get Out*

is more self-reflexive than *Black Panther* in portraying the screen within a screen. It is also more direct in forcing viewers to consider the representation of a lack of representation of Black subjectivity in television.

As part of the constructionist approach to representation discussed by Hall in “The Work of Representation,” the instances of micro-aggression enacted through communication by the white characters in *Get Out* racialize the protagonist as “the Black guy” and not “Chris.” The physical markers of his Blackness — not his opinions, or what he “wants” — are deemed more important by the white buyers. This manifestation of racializing the African American is enacted through subtle, yet sly, comments aimed at stereotyping the Black body. It is part of the “new face of racism” referred to as “racism 3.0” in Augie Fleras’s study of micro-aggression as contributing to this type of racism. In *Get Out*, racism 3.0 is enacted mainly through micro-aggressive language. The Armitage family, and the prospective white buyers, display micro-aggressions in their casual stereotyping of Chris and other African Americans. Jeremy Armitage (Caleb Landry Jones), Dean’s son, admires Chris’s “frame and genetic makeup” (00:24:36-00:24:39) before attempting to put him in a headlock, and Hiroki Tanaka (Yasuhiko Oyama) asks Chris if “being African-American is more advantage or disadvantage in the modern world?” (00:54:36-00:54:45). The casual tone of the remarks heightens the awkwardness of the interactions between Chris and the others. The micro-aggressions serve different purposes. For example, Dean attempts to mimic Black communication in order to make Chris feel at home, and Jeremy’s admiration of Chris’s genes is envious as well as insulting because it objectifies Chris’s body. Hiroki’s question exemplifies what Fleras characterizes as “commonplace indignities,” such as “offhand comments” and “clumsy curiosity” (7). The “offhand comments” from those like Dean, Jeremy, and Hiroki correspond to what Fleras calls “micro-racial bias.” Fleras goes on to say that racism 3.0 “operates ‘under the radar’ through thinly veiled compliments, aversive (re)actions, and seemingly neutral language” (2-3). Accompanying the subtle expressions of micro-racial bias are the overtly racist practices exercised by the white characters.

The most blatant representation of the Black body as property to be sold is exemplified in the scene where the prospective buyers pretend to play bingo. They use the game as a front for a silent auction wherein they bid for Chris’s body. The silent auction is the climax of the annual gathering hosted by the Armitages. It operates as a modern version of a slave auction, where the wealthy whites can acquire a Black body for their use. In *Get Out*, Black skin is coveted and therefore

made transactional. Chris's Blackness is evaluated based on the desirable qualities worthy of being utilized, such as his physique, and the undesirable qualities that are surplus to requirements, such as his memories and emotions. When Chris asks, "Why Black people?" Jim replies, "People wanna change, some people wanna be stronger, faster, cooler" (01:24:45-01:25:00). The issue of appropriation of the Black body and culture is explored in the exchange between Chris and Jim. Blackness is equated with strength, speed, and style. Gordon Green (John Wilmot) expresses a similar sentiment of appropriating Black athleticism, but not Black skin, in the over-compensation of his admiration for Tiger Woods.

This trophy-casing of the Black body extends to Andre and Chris, who are paraded like breeding horses. To extend the animal symbolism, mentioned earlier in the deer incident, Chris is treated like a show-monkey. He is asked to show his tennis form and his skin is envied for now being 'in fashion.' In a stereotypical manner of hypersexualizing the Black man, a woman asks Rose, "So is it true, is it better?" (00:43:31-00:43:38) The question of sexual prowess, however, leads into the issue of another type of enslavement, one which Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howery) tragi-comically iterates numerous times: the utilization of Black men as sex-slaves. Rod is Chris's best friend and plays the significant role of rescuing Chris. However, he also functions as a source of comic relief in a deeply tragic story. Rod's conspiracy theory of the Armitages turning Blacks into sex slaves may be for comic effect but disturbingly so, because enslaved African men were often reduced to a phallic function. The scene where Rose drinks milk and eats Fruit Loops — colored cereal — separately while searching online images of Black sportsmen is another act of stereotyping based on sexual perversion. However, Rod is right on at least one count: the Black body is enslaved after it is filled with the White consciousness.

Get Out explores the idea of Chris being hypnotized into being a slave as a way of collapsing racial and post-racial distinctions. Therefore, Rose's romantic relationship with Chris is encouraged by her family because it gives the impression of the Armitages being anti-racist. Another example of the Armitage family trying to appear anti-racist occurs when Dean, as if to compensate for white privilege, prides himself on voting for Barack Obama, even for a third term, if it were possible. The reality is that the guiltless suppression of Black freedom still occurs. Practices such as the kidnapping, imprisonment, hypnosis, and erasure of the Black body and mind highlight the suppression dealt by the white characters. The use of the Black body is a warped ideology handed down to each generation of the Armitage family. As Roman says, African Americans are chosen by the Coagula

because of “physical advantages” and other “natural gifts” they have “enjoyed” throughout their entire lifetime (01:14:03-01:14:12). It also echoes Dean’s earlier comment that he enjoys the “privilege to experience someone else’s culture” (00:16:56-00:16:59). The appropriation of Black culture by the white characters in the film is layered with a self-proclaimed right to use the Black body for their own purposes.

The motivation for the selection of African American bodies resembles the warped justification for the use of West Africans as slaves. Critics such as Kenneth Kiple and Henry Rose Carter have strongly argued for an inherited and genetic immunity of the African. This belief has led to justifications of the Black body as genetically predisposed to particular advantages. Such advantages are creatively explored in *Get Out* as being stronger and faster, according to characters such as Jim Hudson and Jeremy Armitage. According to Kiple, “It can be said then, with little fear of exaggeration, that Black-related disease immunities played a crucial role in the wholesale enslavement of the West African” (8). Carter agrees, saying that “the negro [...] has a true racial resistance which is not dependent upon prior infection or exposure” (264). What both critics attempt to argue is that the West African was carefully selected to be enslaved because their bodies brought advantages such as having greater immunity to diseases. Despite more recent theories that disprove Kiple’s or Carter’s thesis,⁷ the very fact that those like Kiple and Carter believed in such a thing as genetic immunity is embodied by the Armitages and the propaganda they spread in *Get Out*.

The coagula is the overriding symbol used by Roman Armitage to explain the co-opting of the Black body as a shell for the white mind. After phase one, hypnosis, where the Black mind is separated from the body, the Black individual undergoes psychological pre-op: phase two. During this phase, the Black individual is mentally prepared through an introduction to the Armitage cult. The mental preparation involves brainwashing them into believing that their bodies are valuable vessels for the housing of white consciousness. Dean Armitage, referring to his white ancestry, declares, “We are divine. We are the gods trapped in cocoons” (01:08:34-01:08:40). Phase three — the transplantation — completes the white-washing, mind-washing process which attempts to achieve a quasi-immortality. The coagula procedure is described by Roman Armitage as a “man-made miracle”

⁷ See for example Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen, eds., *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*.

(01:14:26-01:14:28). Although the cult of the Armitage Order, as highlighted by Dean, believes in white privilege as divine, the transplantation relies on Black bodies for the survival of white consciousness.

As Peele is careful to dramatize, the villain in this horror movie is the monster of racism and the systemic utilization of the Black body by the cult Order. During the interview with Brooke Marine, Peele describes relationships between the Black and white characters in the film as “an allegory for the way we deal with race” and “the idea of being desired for our [Black] physicality and desired for our culture, but not respected as being equal souls and human beings.” By making the statement that Black lives, not just their bodies and culture, do in fact matter, Peele accomplishes the allegorical subtext of the story.

Conclusion

Get Out is a creative, cultural representation of voicing the illusion of a post-racial United States of America. Peele’s discussion of the socio-political backdrop to *Get Out* is as relevant as the post-racial racialism dramatized in the movie. This type of racism is unashamedly renewed, re-invigorated, and disguised and carries the potential to be equally destructive. It is similar to the “emboldened racism” Peele discusses in an interview with Brooke Marine. This mutation of race relations in the United States of America is described by Ian F. Haney-López as that which “operates as a political or perhaps even an ideological approach toward the continuing astringent of race” (808). Functioning in a similar way to *Get Out*’s Afro-centric perspective, *Black Panther* has done much more than break box office records; it has focused the spotlight on an entire race. Both movies have received exhaustive accolades for their unique perspectives of the need for greater representation.⁸ To do this, they each exemplify the constructionist approach to transmitting meaning. As outlined by Stuart Hall in “The Work of Representation,” the constructionist approach involves “symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate” (25). The films analyzed here are significant for the ways in which they provide a contemporary discourse on

⁸ *Black Panther* is the highest grossing film in the Marvel cinematic franchise and the third highest grossing film of all time in the United States of America. *Get Out* is the highest grossing original debut, and its director, Jordan Peele, became the first Black screenwriter to win an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2018.

Black representation in and through film, and they are worthy of attention because they offer new interpretations of Black subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

Peele's use of satire to critique the systemic new face of racism in contemporary America is as useful as Coogler's Afro-futuristic speculation of an advanced, uncolonized African continent. In both cases, the directors, whether through Afro-surrealism by Peele or Afro-futurism by Coogler, challenge viewers to think differently about race relations and Black subjectivity. By doing so, the movies offer more than entertainment value. Deep socio-historical issues explored in these films have resonated not only with the African diaspora but also the entire world. Through the constructivist approach to creating meaning, the movies call attention to the significance of representation and why it is needed more than ever to combat the historical disenfranchisement of people of African descent. *Get Out* and *Black Panther* offer a pop-culture reconceptualization of what it means to be of African ancestry through film narratives and genres that are easily accessible while ensuring that the content is socially relevant to contemporary discussion of an on-going battle for greater representation by people of color. The diverse manners of representation found in each film highlight the nuances of Black culture. As such, the films are significant because, through their unique genres, they can represent Black culture and subjectivity in unique ways and thereby draw attention to the ways in which Blackness is creatively imagined.

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