MEDIA 101: Film Studies
Week 11

Black Panther

The politics of a blockbuster

Analysis of the film will be in two parts:

1. The superhero film as a blockbuster, paying particular attention the transmedial logic of the Marvel Cinematic Universe

2. The aesthetics and narrative of radical black politics

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Media & Advertising › Radio, TV & Film › Superhero movies: domestic box office revenue

Combined annual domestic box office revenue of superhero movies from 1978 to 2018 (in million U.S. dollars)
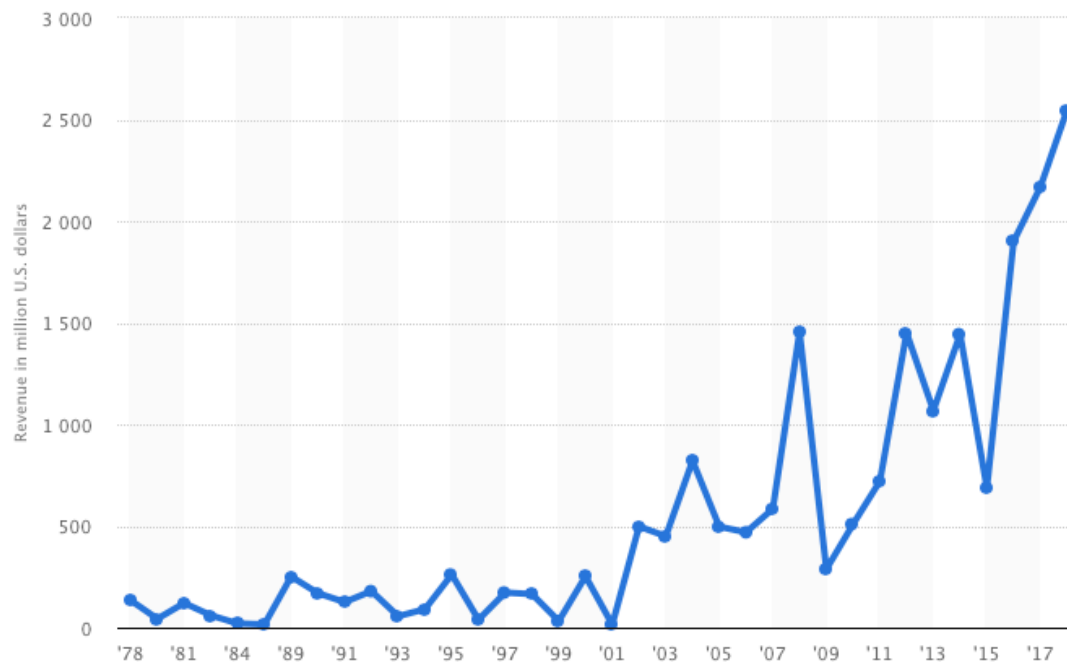
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DESCRIPTION SOURCE MORE INFORMATION

This statistic provides information on the combined annual domestic box office revenue of superhero movies from 1978 to 2018. In 2018, the superhero movies Black Panther, Avengers: Infinity War, Deadpool 2, Incredibles 2, Ant-Man and the Wasp, and Teen Titans Go! To The Movies collected a combined box office revenue of over 2.5 billion U.S. dollars. Black Panther was the highest grossing superhero movie of 2018, bringing in over 700 million U.S. dollars.
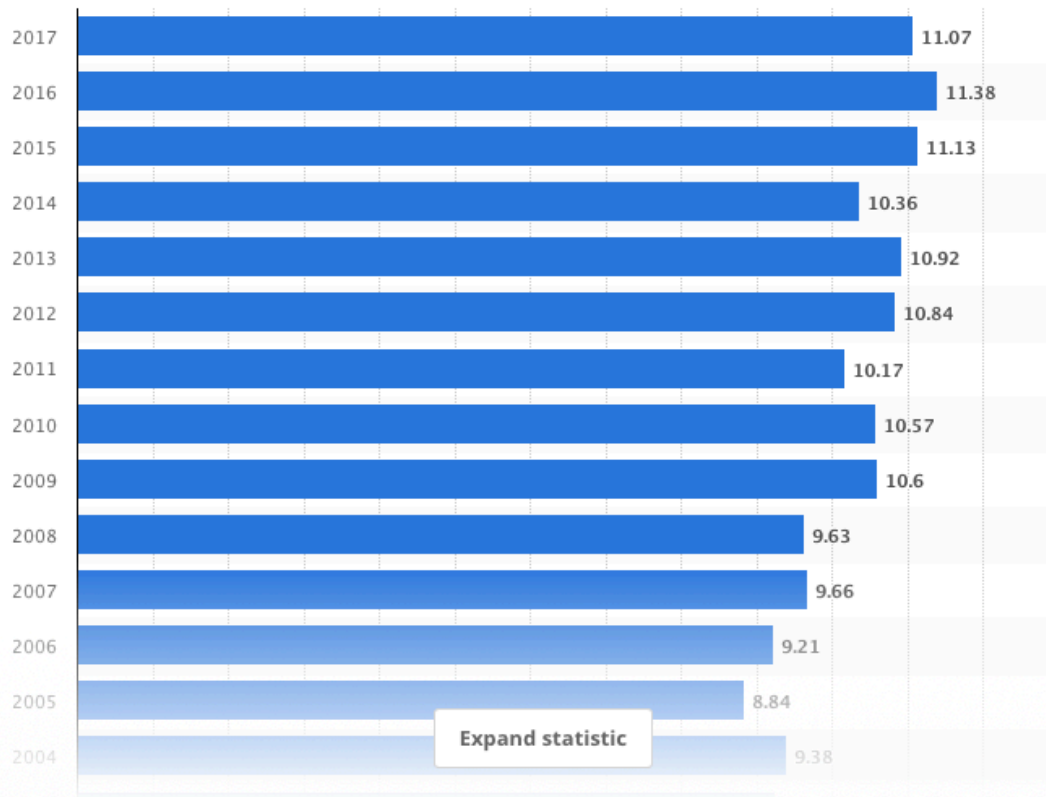
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Media & Advertising › Radio, TV & Film › North American box office revenue from 1980 to 2017

‹ Back to search

Box office revenue* in North America from 1980 to 2017 (in billion U.S. dollars)

Year	Revenue
2017	11.07
2016	11.38
2015	11.13
2014	10.36
2013	10.92
2012	10.84
2011	10.17
2010	10.57
2009	10.6
2008	9.63
2007	9.66
2006	9.21
2005	8.84
2004	9.38

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DESCRIPTION | SOURCE | MORE INFORMATION

The statistic above presents data on the annual box office gross revenue in the US and Canada. In 2016, 11.37 billion US dollars was earned at the box office.

Box office revenue in North America

The film industry uses box office revenue, or, the amount of money generated through movie ticket sales, to measure the commercial success of the films it produces. Ticket sales also account for a sizable portion of the film industry's total revenues. Almost 1.32 billion tickets were sold at the North American box office in 2016. The average ticket price was 8.65 dollars, marking an increase of over one dollar since 2009.

Data visualized by ╬ ✚ + a b l e a u˙

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Marvel Studios/Disney

Dir. Ryan Coogler
Fruitvale Station, 2013
Creed, 2015

Black Panther, 2018

$ 1.347 billion US as of May 2018

12th highest grossing film of all time (1 of 5 Marvel films in the top 12)
4th highest grossing film of all time in the domestic (US) market ($700 million), 9th when figures adjusted for inflation

Also notable for having a predominantly black cast and creative team

Marvel Comics

Timely Publications and related characters date back to 1939

Modern Marvel universe born in 1961 with first issue of *The Fantastic Four*

Bankruptcy in 1996

Deal with Merrill Lynch in 2005 worth $525 million over 7 years

Marvel Entertainment sold to Disney in 2009 for $4.24 billion

X-Men (2000), *dir.* Bryan Singer
20C Fox
Showed what could be done
with Marvel characters

Iron Man (2008) *dir.* Jon Favreau
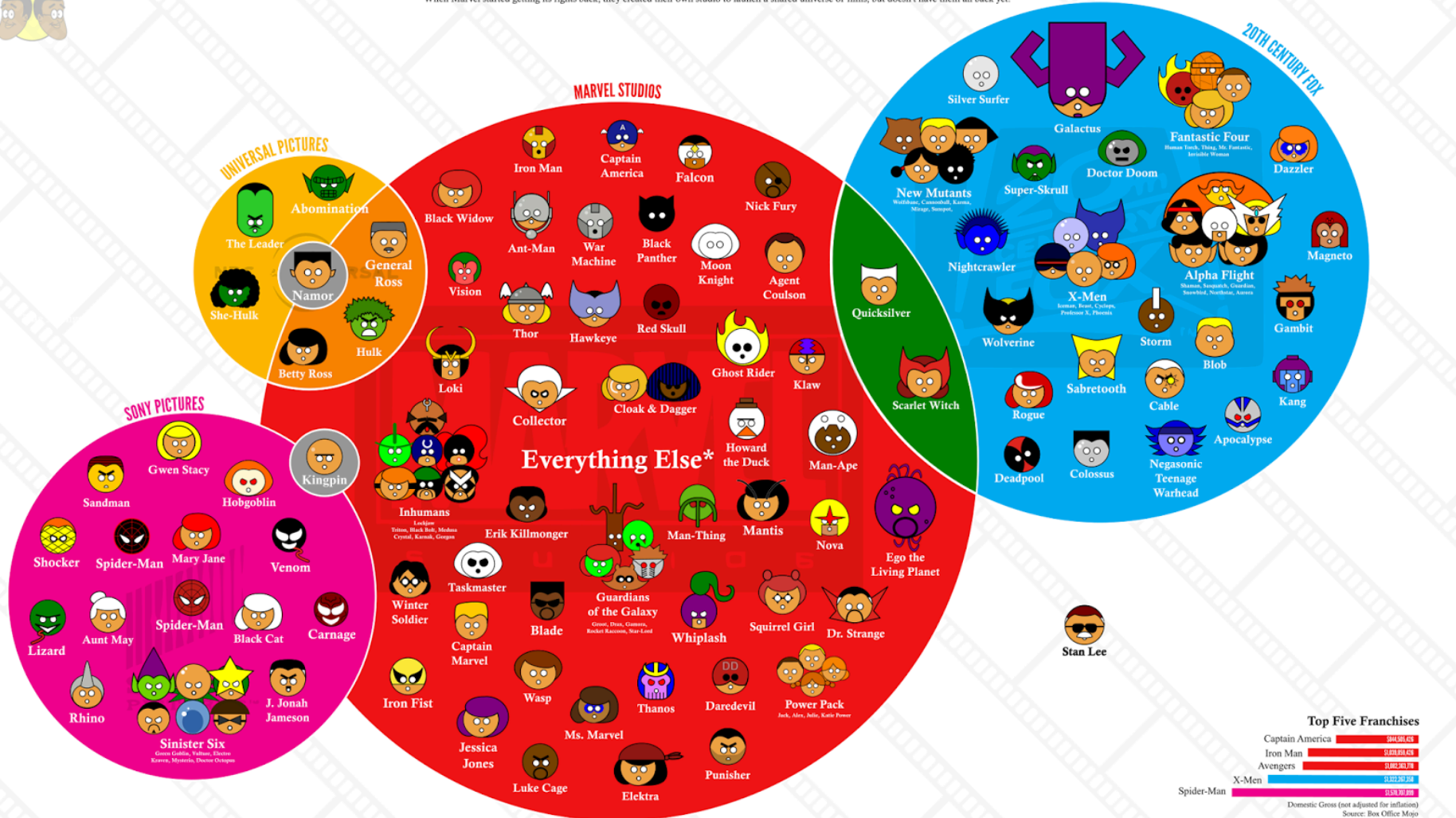was the first Marvel Studios film
and first in MCU

Marvel's financial problems lead to complex film rights

Marvel sell The Fantastic Four to Constantin Film in 1986

Film made by New Horizon Studios in 1992 – dir. Roger Corman

21st Century Fox take over rights in 2004
- Fantastic Four, 2005 – dir. Chris Columbus
- Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer, 2007 – dir. Tim Story

X-Men to 20C Fox, 1993
Spider-Man to Sony, 1998

Rights returned to Marvel for Black Panther from Columbia Pictures and Iron Man from New Line Cinema in 2005

Disney buy 21st Century Fox ?

BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT DISNEY

Shareholders have approved Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox

Another hurdle cleared

By Andrew Liptak | @AndrewLiptak | Jul 27, 2018, 10:47am EDT

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Illustration by James Bareham / The Verge

Marvel negotiate shared rights for Spider-Man, hence the film's title

VISUAL GUIDE TO MARVEL LIVE-ACTION CHARACTER RIGHTS

by The Geek Twins

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http://nerdist.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Marvel-Infographic-rights-2018.jpg

In the 1990s, Marvel Comics began selling off the movie rights of its characters, so only certain studios could use them.
When Marvel started getting its rights back, they created their own studio to launch a shared universe of films, but doesn't have them all back yet.
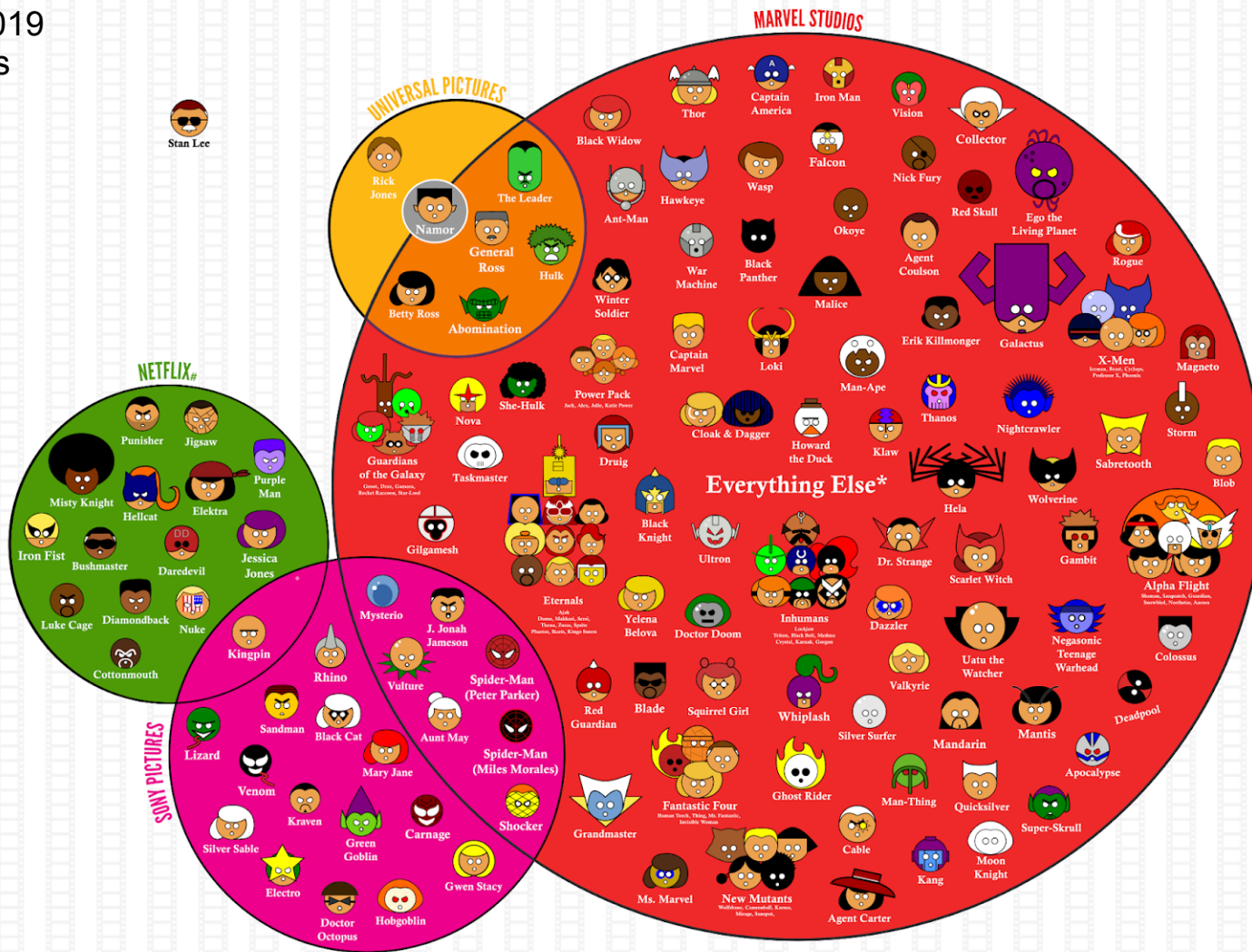
UNIVERSAL PICTURES: She-Hulk, The Leader, Namor, General Ross, Hulk, Betty Ross, Abomination

SONY PICTURES: Sandman, Vulture, Spider-Man, Carnage, Silver Sable, Lizard, Venom, Black Cat, Rhino, Kraven, Electro, Green Goblin, Mysterio, Doctor Octopus, Hobgoblin, Gwen Stacy, Aunt May, Mary Jane, Spider-Man, J. Jonah Jameson, Shocker, Kingpin

Everything Else*: Thor, Captain America, Iron Man, Vision, Collector, Stan Lee, Black Widow, Hawkeye, Wasp, Falcon, Nick Fury, Ant-Man, Okoye, Agent Coulson, Doctor Doom, Galactus, Rogue, Winter Soldier, War Machine, Black Panther, Malice, Silver Surfer, Super-Skrull, X-Men (Iceman, Beast, Cyclops, Professor X, Phoenix), Magneto, Red Skull, Loki, Erik Killmonger, Quicksilver, Power Pack (Jack, Alex, Julie, Katie Power), Squirrel Girl, Cloak & Dagger, Man-Ape, Thanos, Storm, Guardians of the Galaxy (Groot, Drax, Gamora, Rocket Raccoon, Star-Lord), Ego the Living Planet, Nova, Captain Marvel, Howard the Duck, Klaw, Nightcrawler, Wolverine, Sabretooth, Blob, Taskmaster, Scarlet Witch, Gambit, Alpha Flight (Shaman, Sasquatch, Guardian, Snowbird, Northstar, Aurora), Blade, Whiplash, Inhumans (Lockjaw, Triton, Black Bolt, Medusa, Crystal, Karnak, Gorgon), Dr. Strange, Iron Fist, Dazzler, Uatu the Watcher, Cable, Colossus, Jessica Jones, Daredevil, Mantis, Negasonic Teenage Warhead, Deadpool, Luke Cage, Elektra, Ghost Rider, Fantastic Four (Human Torch, Thing, Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Woman), Man-Thing, Moon Knight, Apocalypse, Agent Carter, Ms. Marvel, New Mutants (Wolfsbane, Cannonball, Karma, Mirage, Sunspot), Kang, Punisher

Top Five Franchises

	Domestic Gross (not adjusted for inflation)
Captain America	$844,505,425
Iron Man	$1,839,859,425
Avengers	$3,082,363,178
X-Men	$3,223,262,250
Spider-Man	$1,912,988,230

Source: Box Office Mojo

* Disclaimer: While this graphic shows many characters, it's impossible to show every character in the Marvel universe.
Unless otherwise noted other characters would be owned by the studio that owns the related property (ex. Aunt May)

Illustration by Maurice Mitchell 2017 v. 5

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References: Screenrant, Newsarama, Wikipedia, Reddit

Version 8, 2019
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In the 1990s, Marvel Comics began selling off the movie rights of its characters, so only certain studios could use them.
When Marvel started getting its rights back, they created their own studio to launch a shared universe of films, but doesn't have them all back yet.

Stan Lee

UNIVERSAL PICTURES
Rick Jones, Namor, The Leader, General Ross, Betty Ross, Hulk, Abomination

MARVEL STUDIOS
Thor, Captain America, Iron Man, Vision, Collector, Black Widow, Falcon, Nick Fury, Red Skull, Ego the Living Planet, Ant-Man, Hawkeye, Wasp, Okoye, Agent Coulson, Rogue, War Machine, Black Panther, Malice, Erik Killmonger, Galactus, X-Men (Iceman, Beast, Cyclops, Professor X, Phoenix), Magneto, Winter Soldier, Captain Marvel, Loki, Man-Ape, Thanos, Nightcrawler, Storm, Power Pack (Jack, Alex, Julie, Katie Power), She-Hulk, Nova, Cloak & Dagger, Howard the Duck, Klaw, Sabretooth, Blob, Guardians of the Galaxy (Groot, Drax, Gamora, Rocket Raccoon, Star-Lord), Taskmaster, Druig, Black Knight, Hela, Wolverine, Gilgamesh, Eternals (Ajak, Druig, Makkari, Sersi, Thena, Zuras, Sprite, Phastos, Ikaris, Kingo Sunen), Ultron, Dr. Strange, Gambit, Alpha Flight (Shaman, Sasquatch, Guardian, Snowbird, Northstar, Aurora), Yelena Belova, Doctor Doom, Inhumans (Lockjaw, Triton, Black Bolt, Medusa, Crystal, Karnak, Gorgon), Dazzler, Scarlet Witch, Uatu the Watcher, Negasonic Teenage Warhead, Colossus, Red Guardian, Blade, Squirrel Girl, Whiplash, Valkyrie, Silver Surfer, Mantis, Deadpool, Mandarin, Apocalypse, Grandmaster, Fantastic Four (Human Torch, Thing, Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Woman), Ghost Rider, Man-Thing, Quicksilver, Super-Skrull, Cable, Moon Knight, Ms. Marvel, New Mutants (Wolfsbane, Cannonball, Karma, Mirage, Sunspot), Agent Carter, Kang

*Everything Else**

NETFLIX#
Punisher, Jigsaw, Purple Man, Misty Knight, Hellcat, Elektra, Iron Fist, Bushmaster, Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Diamondback, Nuke, Cottonmouth

SONY PICTURES
Mysterio, J. Jonah Jameson, Spider-Man (Peter Parker), Kingpin, Rhino, Vulture, Spider-Man (Miles Morales), Sandman, Black Cat, Aunt May, Lizard, Mary Jane, Venom, Kraven, Shocker, Silver Sable, Green Goblin, Carnage, Gwen Stacy, Electro, Doctor Octopus, Hobgoblin

Netflix Contract Rights Revert to Marvel in 2020 - 2021

* Disclaimer: While this graphic shows many characters, it's impossible to show every character in the Marvel universe.
Unless noted, the studio that owns the character rights also owns the related character rights.

Top Five Marvel Franchises

Captain America	$2,225,941,078
Iron Man	$2,421,728,208
Spider-Man	$5,072,204,006
X-Men	$6,049,554,526
Avengers	$7,784,422,688

Domestic Gross (not adjusted for inflation)
Source: The-Numbers.com

Illustration by Maurice Mitchell 2019 v. 8   All Marvel characters are trademark and copyright of Marvel Entertainment, LLC. All Rights Reserved   References: Screenrant, Newsarama, Wikipedia, Reddit, Variety

The Batman, movie serial, 1943

Christopher Reeve as Superman in *Superman: The Movie*, 1978
Dir. Richard Donner, *dist*. Warner Brothers

Batman, 1989
dir. Tim Burton
dist. Warner Brothers

Kinney National Company bought National Periodical Publications (DC Comics) in 1967, then bought Warner Bros-Seven Arts in 1969

In 1989 Warner Communications merged with Time to create Time-Warner, which was bought by AT&T and renamed Warner Media

Wonder Woman, 2017, *dir.* Patty Jenkins

Aquaman, 2018
Shazam, 2019

Captain America feature film (video), 1979
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p11I6ZZYcbM

1. Transmedia and multi-linear storytelling

"as part of transmedial entertainment franchises that expand beyond cinema, the films […] are indicative of contemporary cinema's repositioning vis-à-vis other media, and they function in conjunction with a variety of related serial texts from other medial contexts rather than on their own—by connecting to superhero comic books, live-action and animated television programming, or digital games, for example. The current prominence of serialization and franchising practices in American blockbuster cinema thus points to a redefinition of the individual feature's role within the larger media landscape: big-budget tentpole features, it seems, no longer function as singular apexes of cinematic production whose central task is to outperform other movies, but have instead become nodes in networks of related media texts and fulcra for audiences' ongoing engagement with constantly expanding entertainment franchises".
- Felix Brinker

Superheroes have always been transmedia objects

Superman - 1938, *Action Comics* #1

1939 Newspaper strip

1940 *The Adventures of Superman* radio series
Kryptonite, appeared in 1943 episode

1941 *Superman* animated series also featured "Is it a bird, is it a plane" adapted from radio

"Truth, Justice and the American Way" is also attributed to a 1942 episode of the series, but is more closely associated with *Adventures of Superman* TV series, 1952-1958
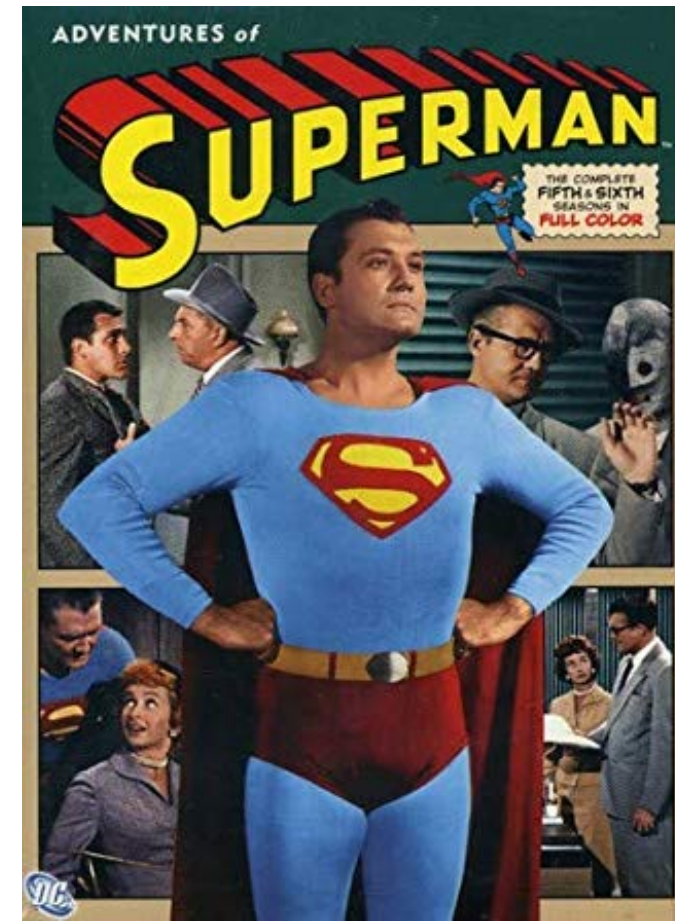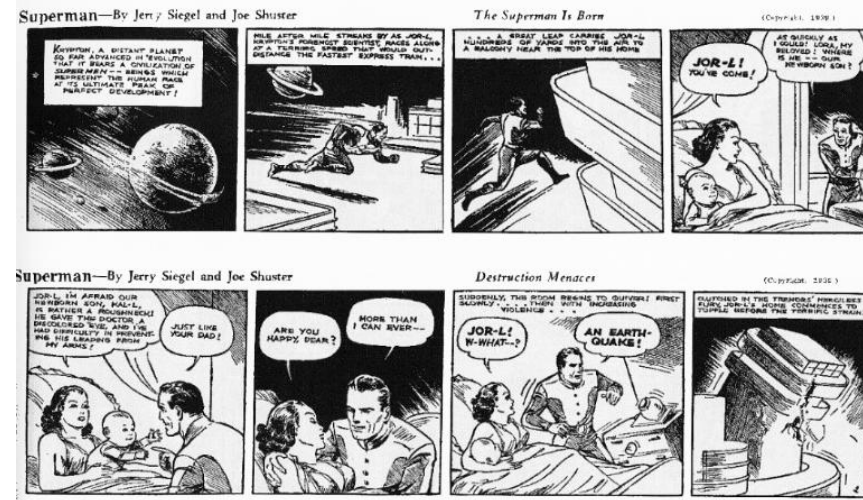
Media convergence and horizontal integration

Consumer capitalism privileges profit-accruing recreational activity as a recurring activity

Redefines the "cinematic experience as a gateway into a set of attendant consumption practices" across multiple serial franchises in dialogue with viewers

Superhero movies "combine different modes of [transmedial] serialization" into a complex mediascape

Seriality, adaptation and reboot have always been central to cinema, as they have been for comics, and wider cultural production, but this has become an increasingly complex, capital-intensive network…

…that increasingly involves work from consumers beyond the simple act of consumption

Marvel Cinematic Universe is a very good example of the current move towards combination of different modes of serialization

"a confluence of linear serial storytelling, transmedial serialization and remaking/adaptation practices" premised on "the 'multi-linear' organizational logics" of Marvel comics

Shane Denson calls this "concrescent seriality" (compound, cumulative), but this has been the model in Marvel comics since 'continuity' began in the 1960s during the Silver Age of comics

The comics *universe* contains a history of events, linked together through team-ups and cross-overs, supplemented by variations across the multiverse different from regular Earth-616 universe

Linear (continuity) non-linear (retro-continuity, multiversal)

The MCU is another alternative universe with its own continuity looking to attract new viewers and old comics fans

Work of consumers as "free labour" – recreation as work

"blockbuster series might be understood as contraptions for the exploitation of audiences' time, attention and cultural activity, or, to put it differently, as mechanisms for the extraction of economic value from the recreational practices of their viewers"

The MCU is constantly pointing itself towards "transmedial extensions" and greater viewer (consumer/fan) immersion

Post-credit scenes, trailers, overt and hidden references

Gift economy vs commodity economy – Henry Jenkins
- Commodities build barriers, tariffs (price, economics), gifts build bridges (sharing, social bond)
- Fans invest in gift-giving for the love of the character and the community of fans to which they belong

Reconstruction of iconic image of Cap punching Hitler, *Captain America* #1, 1941 (Repeated in *America* #1, 2017)

Captain America: The First Avenger, 2011

Erik Selvig's blackboard in *Thor: The Dark World*

2. The politics of a blockbuster

Steel, 1997
dir. Kenneth Johnson
dist. Warner Bros

Blade, 1998
dir. Stephen Norrington
dist. New Line Cinema

The rise of the "Alt-Right", white nationalism and the reaffirmation of patriarchy meant that a film starring three independent, intelligent and strong black women gave it added significance

'Africana Womanism' - Clenora Hudson-Weems, 1987

Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro explains that Africana womanism privileges race over both class and gender and speaks to 'the wholeness of black peoples'.

It therefore 'champions negotiation and harmonious relations between black men and women'.

'the women's centrality in the politics of Wakanda places more precedence on the commitment to the wholeness of Wakanda peoples and the state's sovereignty than to the women's individual subjectivities. Therefore, the women's roles privilege the communal over the individual' in order 'to enable the realization of sustainable futures'.
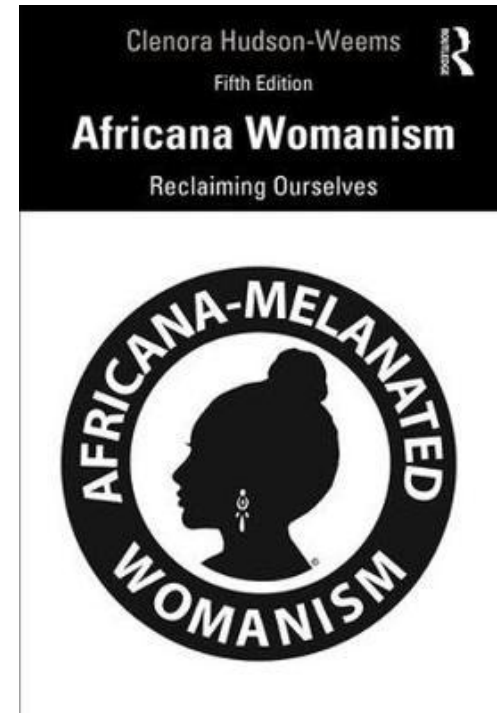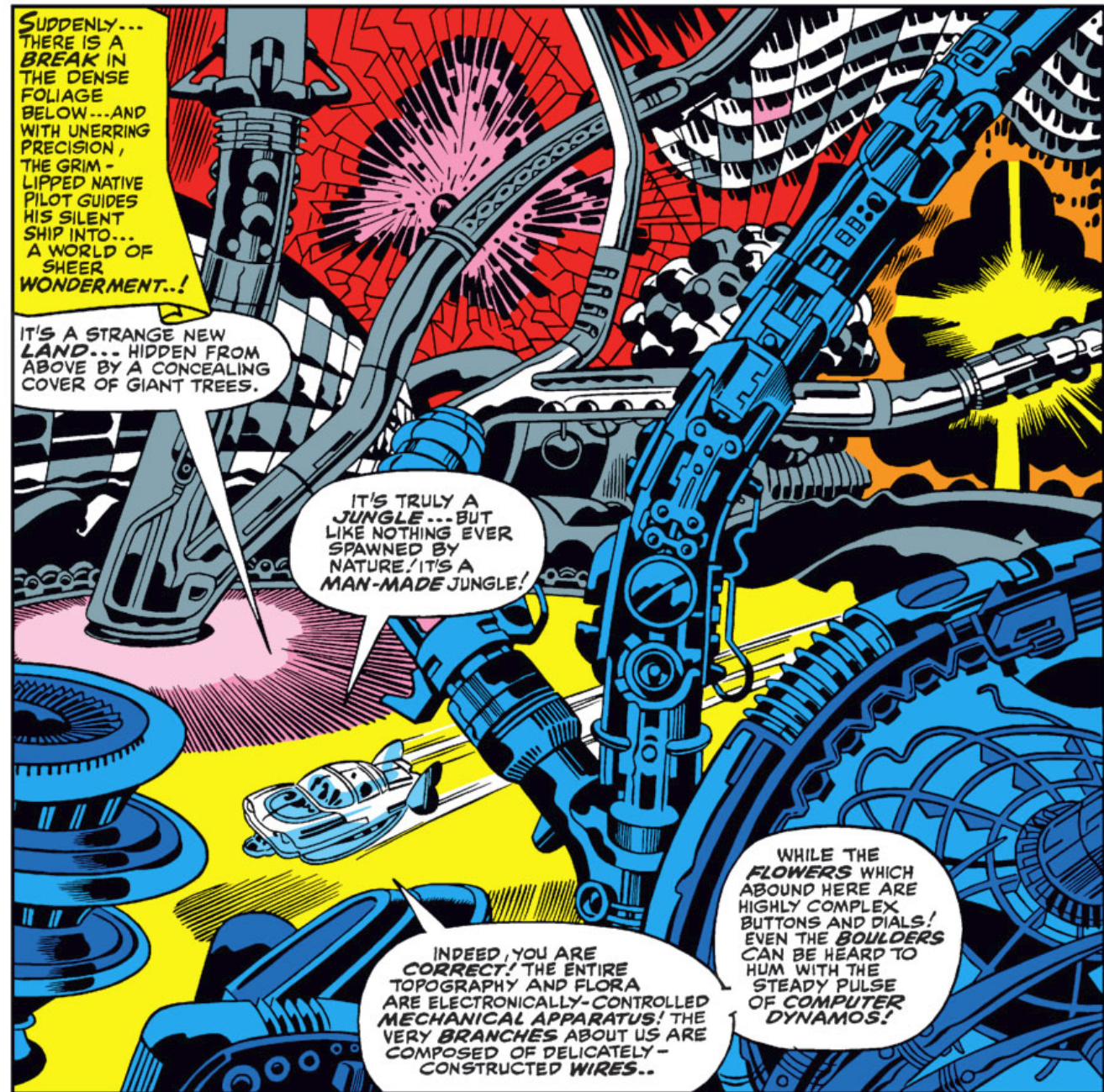
Black Panther (the first black superhero) first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #52 in 1966

1966 was also the year a black civil rights group called The Black Panther Party was created in Oakland, CA

Adilifu Nama talks about the creation of the character and the kingdom of Wakanda as an expression of Afro-Futurism

Michael Goodrum discusses Black Panther's dedication to both Wakanda and US as an example of WEB Du Bois's "double consciousness": that sense of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of the other"

Black Panther challenged easy identification of the West with civilization and reverses trope of white man bringing culture to Africa

#19, January 1976 Don McGregor & Billy Graham
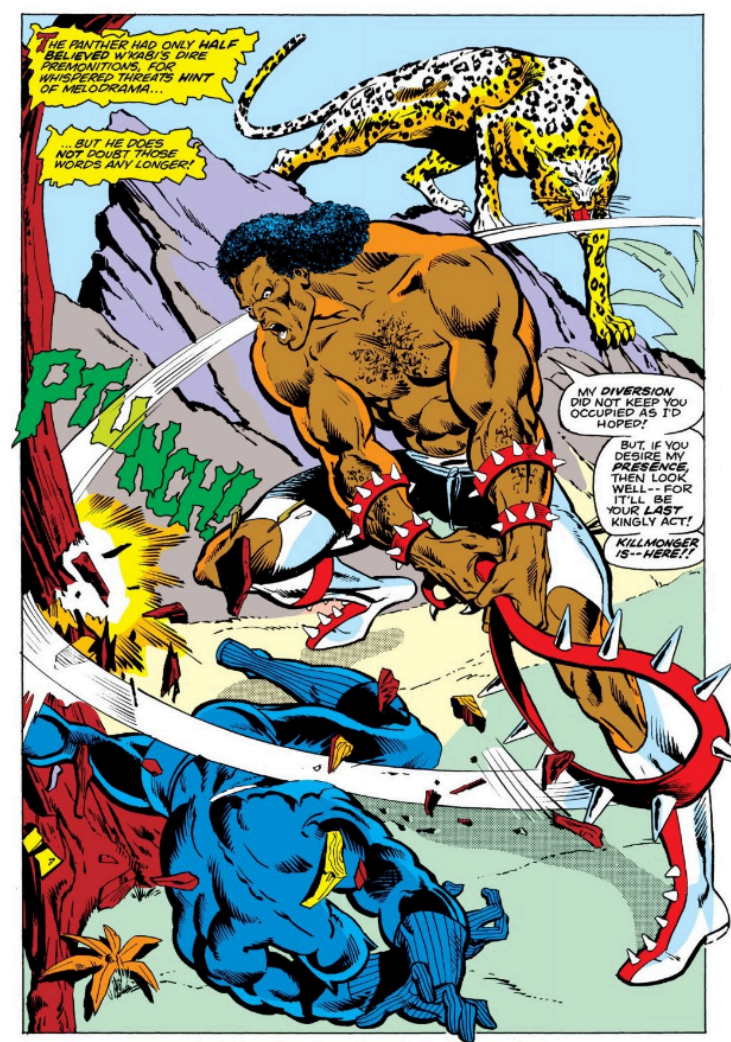
He received his first self-titled story in 1973 in *Jungle Action* #6, which also introduced Killmonger and Preyy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SehdIXwDGH4

MARVEL STUDIOS

BLACK
PANTHER

LONG LIVE THE KING.

2.16.18

CHADWICK BOSEMAN · MICHAEL B. JORDAN · LUPITA NYONG'O · DANAI GURIRA · MARTIN FREEMAN · ANGELA BASSETT · FOREST WHITAKER · ANDY SERKIS

MARVEL STUDIOS

BLACK
PANTHER

WAKANDA FOREVER

IN 3D REAL D 3D 2.16.18 AND IMAX 3D

2a. aesthetics

Sound is important to the film not least in the choice of language

Wakanda is shown to be in the central East of the continent, but the language, Xhosa, is from the southern tip because it is the language spoken by Nelson Mandela
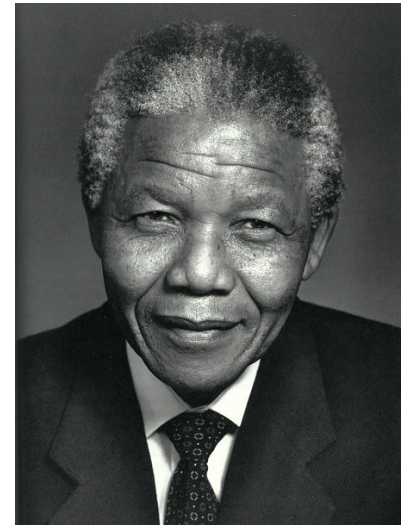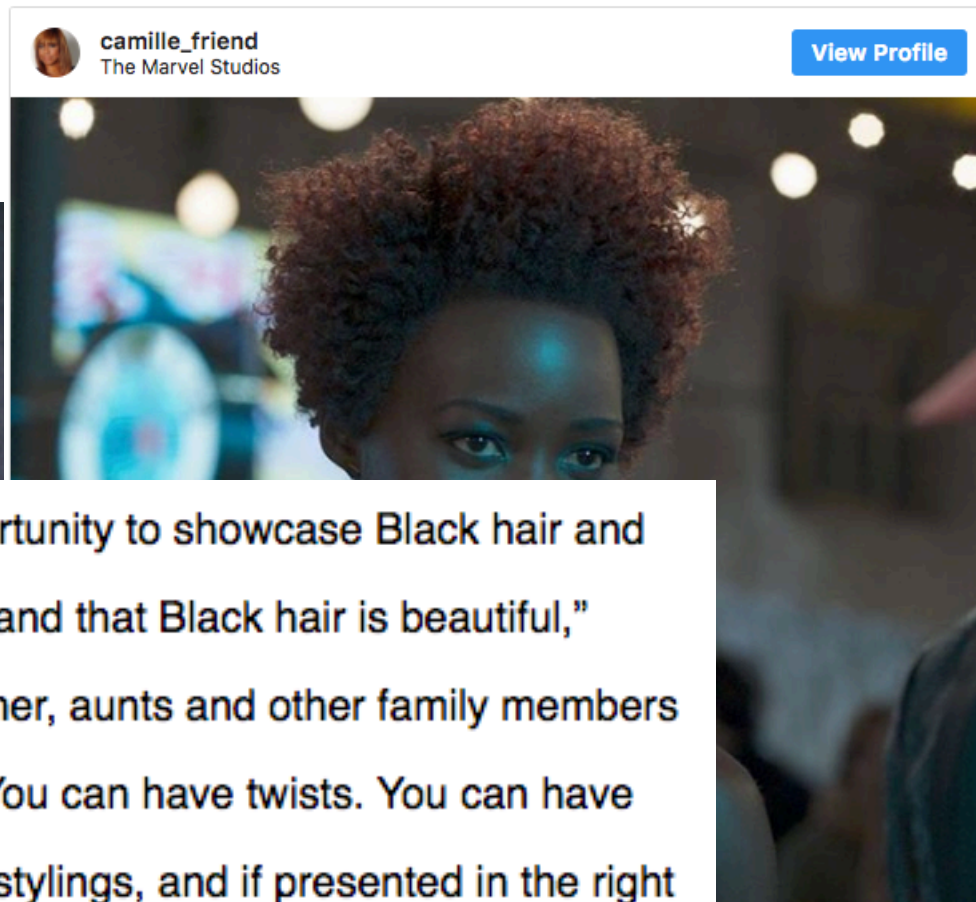
Nakia, T'Challa and Okoye wear the colours of the Pan-African flag

Ruth Carter – *Black Panther* costume designer

Camille Friend and natural hair

"I think *Black Panther* was the perfect opportunity to showcase Black hair and showcase, honestly, that Black is beautiful and that Black hair is beautiful," says Friend, who grew up with a grandmother, aunts and other family members as hairstylists. "You can have dreadlocks. You can have twists. You can have braids. You can have all of the natural hair stylings, and if presented in the right way, it can be presented beautifully."

264 likes

camille_friend Drawing inspiration from African culture, celebrity hairstylist @camille_friendused Leonor Greyl's Masque Fleurs de Jasmin and Serum de Soie Sublimateur to create natural, textured hairstyles for the star-studded cast of @blackpanther. The result, according to @refinery29 , is the "ultimate love letter to black beauty." Read more about how Friend created these looks using #LeonorGreyl with the link in our bio. #LeonorGreylUSA #Refinery29 #BlackPanther Photo courtesy of @marvelstudios

view all 11 comments

2b. narrative

Museum scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwBZlXk8LWg

Theory for my reading of the film

T'Challa (Black Panther) is king of Wakanda, he is the sovereign

The mark of sovereignty is to be able to give the law to subjects or citizens, but perhaps more importantly it is the power to suspend that law in the face of a threat (or declared enemy)

The sovereign can also create spaces where the law doesn't apply – in modern times the example is the concentration camp where "enemies" are abandoned without any protection from the law

This is also the model of colonialism where colonists declared themselves sovereign and exposed the colonised to violence

Colonised defined as savage, animalistic, subhuman and undeserving of the law's protection

They are placed "outside" the law but their exclusion defines it

N'Jobu--T'Chaka's nephew, a Wakandan War Dog, and Eric's father–(with a young Zuri) has learned about how people of colour suffer from the legacy of colonialism in the US and around the world and has teamed up with Klaue to force Wakanda to come out of hiding and share its wealth and knowledge to counter that legacy

When T'Chaka kills N'Jobu to protect Wakanda he abandons Eric who grows up with his father's politics plus a hatred for Wakanda, returning to take over as king and use resources of Wakanda to start a global (counter-colonial) revolution

As in the comic (next slide) Killmonger defeats T'Challa at Warrior Falls, he then assumes the throne, gains his superpowers and destroys all the herbs (next slide) so no one can challenge him
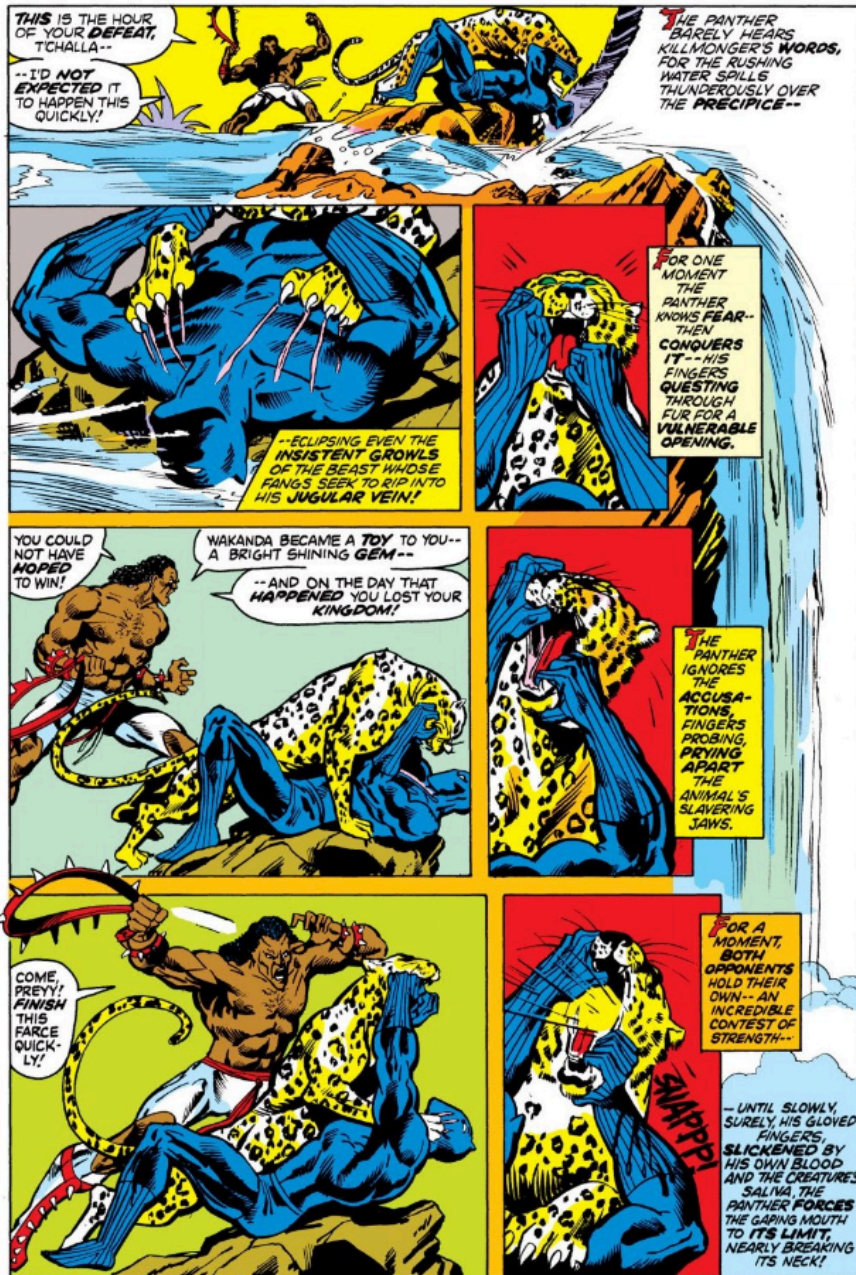
T'Challa, rescued by Nakia, Shuri (sister) and Ramonda (mother) returns to defeat Killmonger

With Killmonger moving from anti-hero to tyrannical super-villain, and then being killed, the radical black politics seems to get lost but the opening up of Wakanda is also a reference to the radical tradition of black cosmopolitanism (see Fanon and Du Bois).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5lnjhYXGEo

KILLMONGER
WAS RIGHT

Wakandan ancestral plane

When Killmonger goes to the Wakandan ancestral plane he actually returns to Oakland the scene of his abandonment and politicization

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NO82ZeIqko

Killmonger manifests as Preyy, the White Leopard, NOT as Black Panther

Kilmonger's death scene:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nG5Tn49nPlg

Susanne Dianne Brophy argues that counter-colonial violence can be a source for alternative form of sovereignty

Counter-colonial violence represents a *radical dissent* different from the inclusion/exclusion of conventional sovereignty

The colonised as animalistic, subhuman "other" legitimises colonial violence – the bad that defines the good, the savage that defines the civilized – and structures any colonial consent

But counter-colonial violence stems from position of never-having-consented – it is truly external to the colonial order of inside and outside, and is better understood as *dignity*

"The African peoples were quick to realise that dignity and sovereignty were exact equivalents" - Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

T'Challa: "Maybe we can still heal you."
Killmonger: "Why? So you can just lock me up? Nah. Just bury me in the ocean with my ancestors that jumped from the ships, 'cause they knew death was better than bondage."