The Contribution of Marvel Studios’ *Black Panther* to the changing portrayal of African Americans in Hollywood
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Abstract

This thesis aims to find out the developments of African American representation onscreen and provides an in-depth analysis of the Marvel Cinematic Universe sci-fi genre with a critical approach to historical and cultural themes. The focus of the thesis will be on the film Black Panther (2018). The portrayal of black people in the American motion picture industry perpetuated the social position that the community obtained in society itself. The presence of African Americans was confined to rather demeaning stereotypical images. Marvel Studios is based on stories regarding superheroes but for a long amount of time there were no black superheroes that people of color could identify with. Therefore, I want to look into what initiated the idea behind Black Panther comics and the movie that came out February of this year, and how it has affected cinema and a larger audience.

Keywords: African Americans, representation, historical and cultural artefacts, television and film genre, Marvel, Black Panther
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Introduction

The issue of African American representation in movies is still apparent in present-day society. The history of African American portrayal in the American motion picture industry has been considered fairly stereotypical and demeaning. The objective of the research is to obtain a better understanding of the developments of the representation of African Americans with a specific focus on the visual aspects in the case of Black Panther (2018). The movie as well as the corresponding album Black Panther: The Album – Music from and Inspired received great acknowledgements by the public. It noted cultural significance that created a huge impact on the audience and the film industry. The depiction alongside the screenplay, performances, direction, production, custom design, and soundtrack of Black Panther managed to bring people together with not solely visual but also musical aspects. Marvel Studios’ Black Panther (2018) as a case study will provide another dimension to the issue of racial representation as it is a heroic story with characters who are predominantly black. The movie is a phenomenon in itself due to the fact that the cast and crew are predominantly black and that the leading character is the first superhero who is from African descent. It is a blockbuster that shows diversity and that is what society needs nowadays. Black Panther is directed by the African American director Ryan Coogler. The movie is deemed to be a positive example for minority groups especially the younger generation. For this thesis, visual as well as musical aspects will be discussed and the empowerment it brings about. It is a new movie that made it to the top 10 of highest grossing movies in such a short time. The film has to prove the developments of representation so far and provides positive prospects for future filmmaking. Black Panther will not be the only subject of attention for other movies from the 21st century – such as other Marvel Studios’ movies and movies with African Americans in a leading role – will also receive a closer look for comparison. The fact that the focus points are also on the support of visuals and audio will offer a more in depth cultural approach.

The analysis of Marvel Studios’ Black Panther (2018) will provide insight on the process of the depiction of race – with the aid of visual and audio representation - in the cultural and historical context regarding 21st century movies. The sources that will be used are findings of representation, stereotypes and film art. Furthermore, analyses of film, music themes and the empowerment of visual and musical elements in film as a whole. It is necessary to dive into different facets to gain a clear understanding of racial representation over the course of time. African Americans gained more recognition in the American film industry in recent years. It took several years but African Americans start to partake a role that makes different ethnic
communities proud. *Black Panther* (2018) is the first ‘black’ Marvel Studios film, which substantiates my hypothesis on recent developments, i.e. in Hollywood a black hero is an asset to the development of inclusiveness. However, a post-racial climate in the representation of minority groups has still to be reached. It is of importance that films show a positive attitude toward diversity and hopefully this is the case and will be improved with each film. The research question is as follows: “How does Marvel Studios’ *Black Panther* change the portrayal of African Americans – in a visual and musical context - concerning cultural and historical aspects in the 21st century.” The study is divided into film, characters, culture, history, politics, and music. The procedure and structure is in line with these following motifs: The historical background of racial representation in American culture and the representation in film needs to be understood. The cultural and political messages that films and lyrics provide need to be studied. The added value of the music album in the film and on its own. The portrayal of characters and the historical and political environment. The influence and making of *Black Panther* and the effects on the film industry as well as its audience. I will conduct my research by first analyzing recent developments in Hollywood as far as the cultural and historical portrayal of African Americans. It is evident to find an answer to whether or not the term American Dream and its connotations are applicable to contemporary film. Subsequently, I will provide a framework for the representation of leadership in Hollywood film, with an emphasis on the Marvel Studios’ genre. This will aid to answer the question regarding the status of African Americans as heroic characters overtime. Lastly, I will offer an in-depth analysis in terms of underlying messages and film styles adopted in *Black Panther* to answer what it contributes to the changing portrayal of African Americans. The focus of this thesis thus is on the struggle for recognition of African American leadership. The research question that is asked is descriptive and explanatory as I am going to provide information as well as an analysis, and I will include three books by the authors Benshoff, Brown and Nama. The book by Benshoff et al. encompasses America on film, Brown’s book provides insight into superheroes in film and Nama’s book is an exemplification of African American popular culture. The thesis is based on African American studies in terms of representation, stereotypes, genre and heroism. Books and films that are used for reference cover the previously mentioned themes in depth. *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson provides information on the significance of film form and techniques. Furthermore, it aims to provide context of changes in film across history. A particular focus of this thesis will be on the fundamental film style mise-en-scene. Another book is *The American Dream*, written by an American cultural historian Jim Cullen. It describes the history of a notion that shaped a nation. I intend to examine the changing
portrayals of African Americans in American motion pictures. The instruments that will be used belong to the approach that film is seen as a form of art. A component of art is the incorporation of what the work is about and how that is expressed. In the case of film, designs support elements that configure a particular set of messages.

“All works of art might be said to have both form and content” (Benshoff et al., p. 3). “Content is what a work is about, while form is how that content is expressed” (p. 3). Five main aspects that shape the elements of film are literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound design (p. 4). The focus of this thesis will be on literary design, visual design, and sound design. It is important to know how the historical representation regarding African Americans unfolded itself to gain a better understanding of both form and content of American films. In order to do so, there should be a clear representation of social and political developments throughout the history of America. The American ideology is known to be based on the notion of equality. Nevertheless, the celebrated principle ‘all men are created equal’ that Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence did not apply to women nor people with another ethnicity such as Native Americans and Africans. The declaration is referred to as the charter of the American Dream, however, quite abstract compared to the fact of the matter in today’s society. The pursuit of happiness carries numerous variations due to different concepts of dreams that are derived from a particular context. African Americans for example dreamt of freedom from coercive restraints. It should be noted that the Puritans also sought freedom but this had a rather spiritual nature. For African Americans it meant freedom from tangible chains (Cullen, p. 59). The belief of equality is still not completely apparent in contemporary American society which in turn influenced the American motion picture industry. The influence is visible through the term stereotypes which is based on assumptions that overgeneralize a certain trait that multiple people from the same category have in common. It becomes standardized in film such as the stereotype that every tall black man can play basketball or that all maids are from Latin descent. Furthermore, it aided to the creation of a stigma concerning Africans as they were seen as animals who were solely useful for slavery. Stereotypes of African Americans appear in some of the earliest films ever made, including Sambo and Aunt Jemima (1897) which stems from pre-existing cultural artifacts such as the depiction of slavery (p. 78). Moreover, minstrel shows – white actors impersonating blacks – were a tradition in cinema. The Birth of a Nation (1915) was also a movie based on stereotypes along with white supremacy and the hatred toward black people. These so-called minority groups went through social and political processes to change the hardships that they had to deal
with in real life. African Americans fought for justice with campaigns and movements such as the decades-long movement referred to as the civil rights movement. American cinema is part of the American culture which can be defined as features of civilization, characteristics, and social behavior within the United States. Low art is an aspect of culture that includes popular music, movies, television, comic books, and paperback novels (p. 13). The focal points of the thesis are comprised of music, movies, and comic books and thus part of the low art culture. Every cultural artifact which may be in a form of a movie, book, music video, song, joke, billboard, slang term, garment, etc. – is a manifestation of the culture that yields it. “A cultural artifact is thus a text that conveys information, carrying the ideological message of both its authors and the culture that produced it” (p. 14). “Image studies look at the processes of representation – the systems we use to communicate and understand our world – language, art, speech and more recently TV, movies, and newer forms of media” (p. 14). Encoding and decoding are two stages that can be applied to any text between producers and spectators. The notion of encoding covers the stage of production and the other stage decoding encompasses the reception of a text. The method is to decode the meaning and the added value of the film *Black Panther* (2018) from the perspective of an audience member. Decoding can be done in three ways i.e. dominant, negotiated, and oppositional.
Chapter 1. Cinematic representations of African Americans

The development in terms of representation of African Americans in Hollywood is a key element to this research. I will analyze the developments and changes in the representation by going back to the history of African American portrayal in film. I mentioned that the notion American Dream is an important facet regarding this question because it measures the changing factors throughout the historical portrayal. African Americans continuously fought for their freedom and equal treatment. This was their harsh truth in reality and was reflected on screen, which ultimately led to the ongoing strive for advancement and success. I will provide background information on the progress by referring to Jim Cullen’s *The American Dream*. The dream of upward mobility has been apparent since the era of slavery. Slavery was the root of all inequality as it was legal in all the colonies around the 17th century. Upward mobility remained possible, but the terms had a decisively racial cast (Cullen, p. 61), which means that African Americans were kept in an inferior position. One of the first examples of dependency came from the escaped slave Frederick Douglass, he escaped to become a free man which exemplifies the Dream of Upward Mobility. For slaveholders, freedom meant the right to own slaves but for slaves freedom meant the complete opposite. The American Dream for white people entailed economic prospects despite the consequences. Freedom had different implications which becomes ostensive in the following quote by the Virginian John Tyler who commented on the notion that all men are created equal with “the principle, although lovely and beautiful, cannot obliterate those distinctions in society which society itself engenders and gives birth to” (p. 90). Society in its entirety has to be wary of the fact that each person is equal and therefore deserves equal treatment. African Americans were deprived of civil, political and social equality but they did not have the intention to surrender. Social movements were formed to win the battle of equal rights. The civil rights movements prevailed with determined leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other movements led by figures such as Malcolm X. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream and it was “he more than anyone else who articulated the moral and cultural basis for equality in American life – not only for African Americans, but for all Americans” (p. 110). The struggle for freedom and equality is entwined in U.S. history, King Jr. had a dream, a dream for progression. As Cullen states in his book, African Americans began to realize that freedom was a precondition for equality (p. 113). They first had to gain freedom from confinement to experience equality in the way of life. Upward mobility is now a term that African Americans still attempt to achieve on and off screen.
The cinematic representations of African Americans are a reflection of the social climate in America. Fortunately, due to social changes there seems to be a shift in the depiction of African Americans in film. Get Out (2017), The First Purge (2018), and The Equalizer 2 (2018) with Denzel Washington are examples of the opposite narrative with resilient black male characters. The African American stereotypes were apparent in early film and mainly acted as derogatory images that were exaggerated as a means of mockery. It all started with the white tradition of minstrelsy and blackface, which is a musical phenomenon whereby white actors impersonated blacks. The tradition continued in theaters and cinema until the 20th century. “Film historian Donald Bogle has identified five stereotypes of African Americans that repeatedly appear in classical Hollywood cinema…” (Benshoff et al., p. 78). The first is the incompetent and lazy stereotype Coon who was an imprudent character. Secondly, the well-known Uncle Tom who was a faithful slave to a white master. Thirdly, the female character Mammy who was the caretaker of the children of a white master. Fourthly, the Tragic Mulatto who was mixed-race and received punishment for that ‘sin’. Lastly, the character Black Buck was an animalistic and hyper-masculine black character who was a threat to the white establishment (p. 79). The Birth of a Nation (1915) is an example of a movie in which African Americans are depicted as the stereotypical lazy, vicious and ignorant. During this time, blacks lived under strict social and political restrictions and the Jim Crow Laws that approved unequal treatment made matters worse. African Americans wanted to see change in the ways they were treated and tried to achieve that with several movements overtime. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded in 1908, was one of the organizations that tried to combat racism. Another movement was the Harlem Renaissance that celebrated black art, culture, literature and music in the 1920s and 1930s. The political stance on whites and minorities was mirrored onto screen. Luckily, the race movie industry started to flourish with filmmaker Oscar Micheaux who tackled the subjects of lynching and passing – process whereby people who are light-skinned try to pass for a white person and deny their own ethnic background to be accepted as solely white. Hollywood still remained to have the upper hand as their influence was undeniable and their goal was to make money instead of creating equality. In the following years African Africans did appear in movies but often in supporting roles that were based on stereotypes because they had no other option than to play demeaning parts. A memorable actress who won an Oscar for her role in Gone with the Wind (1939) was Hattie McDaniel. She was an example for the black community even though she played type casted roles, just as Bill Robinson who played the part of servant and butler. Blacks were featured in movies but the industry was dominated by whites which led to derogatory images
of black people. Furthermore, movies about racism were filmed from a white viewpoint rather than from a black viewpoint. The Red Scare helped to change the romanticized version of America on screen and people such as Martin Luther King Jr. who was the leader of non-violent demonstrations and boycotts organized by African Americans for equality throughout the 1950s. The Brown v. Board of Education was a significant moment for blacks due to the decision to overturn the separate but equal doctrine. A prominent actor of that era was another Oscar winning African American named Sidney Poitier. He was an actor who portrayed positive roles that were different from the negative stereotypes. It can be said that black representation in Hollywood cinema was weighted down by a couple of factors such as history and geography. Nama states, however, that “black representation and the meaning of black racial formation in the science fiction film rest on the shifting tide of race relations that have occurred in American society over the past fifty years” (Nama, p. 157). The Black Panther Party was a political organization established in 1966. It was founded in the wake of the assassination of Malcolm X, a black nationalist. One of the efforts by the Panthers was “to recreate symbolic culture, they began to have widespread influence on the transformation taking place in African American culture and aesthetics” (Ongiri, p. 34). The Black Panthers belonged to the larger Black Power movement emphasizing black pride, civil rights, and community control. The emergence of Black Power nationalism ultimately led to a positive shift toward the prominence of African Americans in the political and public sphere in the late 1960s. Moreover, this shift was also apparent in Hollywood cinema with the emergence of Blaxploitation. According to Benshoff and Griffin, Blaxploitation films are “cheaply made films of the early 1970s that featured strong, aggressive African American leads, sometimes battling racist white characters and institutions” (p. 412). The term Blaxploitation was coined in the early 1970s and includes famous works such as the movie Super Fly (1972) that dealt with the issue of money and ghetto life. A fun fact is that the remake of Super Fly named SuperFly (2018) will be out this June. These type of films provided a better opportunity for black artists in Hollywood due to the images of black pride and the exposure to institutionalized racism. Amy A. Ongiri states that “the production of Black-themed films during the Blaxploitation era reveals the ways in which African American film strove to create a visual tradition that specifically negotiated and counteracted a history of African American oppression that had largely been formulated and enacted through visual culture and visual coding” (Ongiri, p. 160). Blaxploitation provided a counter narrative to white supremacy and visual culture created through Hollywood and mass media. Nonetheless, Blaxploitation also implied exploiting the African American audience in order to fill Hollywood’s pockets. The phenomenon resulted in a massive increase in black
films and the presence of black actors. In Hollywood films such as *The Color Purple* (1985) and a new generation of African American actors including Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman helped with the proliferation of diversion in film. Neo-Blaxploitation was a term that was used for gangster movies such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991). Spike Lee also engaged in race-related issues with movies such as the classic *Malcolm X* (1992) that revolves around the important civil rights leader. Ethnic portrayal in American science fiction cinema and other genres became more mixed after the 1990s. The movie *Bamboozled* (2000) portrays minstrelsy in a satirical fashion as it reenacts the minstrel shows with black people instead of white people as they are dressed up as blackface with their faces painted darker than their natural skin tone. Justice and equality triumphed slowly but surely and is continuing to show its effects in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century with successes such as *Bad Boys* (1995), *The Green Mile* (1999), the *Rush Hour* films, the Madea movies, *Dreamgirls* (2006), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Get Out* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018). *Black Panther* is a movie that is unlike Tyler Perry movies – the Madea series – not generally marketed as niche entertainment to audiences of color but instead as a part of what belongs to the mainstream. *Malcolm X* (1992) and *Selma* (2014) grapple racial discrimination whereas *Black Panther* (2018) awakens aspiration that color does not define a hero and ensures people of color, especially the younger generations, being black is something to be proud of.

**Adilifu Nama:** “What makes the Black Panther such a significant figure in American popular culture—as well as black popular culture—is its groundbreaking representation of blackness as more than a stereotypical and racist trope of inferiority. We have to keep in mind the historical context of the superhero’s first emergence—in 1966, against the backdrop of the Civil Rights and burgeoning black-power movement. That becomes important because in many ways [the emergence of a black superhero]...marks a racial transformation happening on a political and social level” (Mattimore).

The representation of superheroes ought to be inclusive as its significance can be found in the idealized version of a powerful and unbeatable self. Minority groups do not often see similar characters that they can identify with because they are underrepresented in Marvel comics and movies. Therefore, the lack of ethnic and gender representation needs to be tackled to create a homogenous projection on screen. Superheroes are action figures who live in a fictional world that conveys an image of advanced technology such as science and high-tech gadgets. According to Nama, black superheroes in Marvel and DC comics are seen as a social symbol that comprises many features of intersection. He states that “they also are social
symbols that represent the intersection of race, science, speculative fiction, black culture, African tradition and technology, and as such stand as ideological place-holders for variegated expressions of black racial identity and black futurism” (Nama, p. 136). In the history of American books, film and television there exists a primitive representation of Africa. However, the comic book series Black Panther shows a contrastive view to the historical and symbolic constructions of Africa as a backward nation. The imagery that is exposed to the reader fits into the category of science fiction and technological advancement. T’Challa belongs to the fictional Kingdom of Wakanda, an area that is portrayed as rather advanced but still carries the African tradition. Nama mentions that “the use of a third-world country as a high-tech base of operation for Black Panther is a pioneering representation given that New York City, a recurring symbol of Western modernity with its towering skyscrapers and bright lights, has for decades occupied our collective imagination as ‘the city that never sleeps’ and played a central role as the urban terrain of choice for a multitude of superheroes” (p. 137). Superheroes are bigger than life personas known to avenge injustice in a world based on fantasies. The science fiction genre in television was primarily based on white actors with a few exceptions of later contributions such as actor Will Smith and writer Octavia Butler. As I previously mentioned, Black Panther appeared in the Marvel comics’ Fantastic four no. 52–53 series, in July 1966. Nama goes on by stating that “although the Black Panther Party and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization’s black panther emblem are not inspired by the Black Panther comic book figure, all three manifestations of the Black Panther are a consequence of the politics of the period in which ‘Black’ became a defining adjective to express the political and cultural shift in the civil rights movement” (p. 137). Black power is a term that got introduced in a declaration by the African American Stokely Carmichael in 1966, a time in which African Americans were still on or below the poverty line. It was just a month after when Black Panther’s character made his debut in the Marvel Comics’ Fantastic Four. Even though it was merely a coincidence, the impact of the image was powerful. Black Panther acts as an expression of Afrofuturism - an ethos that coalesces African technologies, mythologies, and science fiction plus serves to reprimand biased depictions in regard to black people. Black Panther (2018) is considered revolutionary for the reason that it envisions a realm that does address racism and a world wherein black people are not deprived from wealth as they subsume technology and military that changes the perception of Africa being a third world country and blacks being third class citizens. The outlook is a refreshing scenario that helps the culture of America, the landscape of Hollywood and the world at large. Black Panther (2018) is an amalgamation of the genres action, comedy and sci-fi which keeps the audience entertained yet it also tackles issues
affecting black life. Director Ryan Coogler said in an interview with TIME that the movie also engages in another genre that pertains to the issues of African Americans. The movie gained immense popularity before it even premiered and it may be the first blockbuster to have an African American director and a predominately colored cast. *Black Panther* (2018) was long awaited by all audiences and conveys a powerful message that shows people of color matter and deserve to come to the foreground. Black excellence, a groundbreaking moment, a resistance is what the movie is referred to by the public. Themes that challenge institutional prejudice as well as the success of the movie aided in the acknowledgement of black life and tradition. In an era denoted as post-racial it is adverse to celebrate a matter that should have become a standard procedure a long time ago.
Chapter 2. Leadership and character development

As I previously mentioned, stereotypes have positive and negative connotations. Over the course of time African Americans were portrayed rather negatively in traditional Hollywood cinema and mass media. An article by Richard Dyer examines the role of stereotypes. Dyer suggests that social stereotypes and social types in fictions can be recognized as distinct by the various ways in which stereotypes can be used (Dyer, par. 16). He states that social types are used in a more flexible manner than stereotypes. He continues by giving an explanation that social types can have a wide range of roles in a plot such as a helper, hero, or villain whereas stereotypes carry an implicit narrative in its representation. Thus, a stereotype carries a contextual bias as with African Americans who were casted as violent characters or inferior to whites. Blacks portrayed the roles onscreen similarly to their roles off screen, they were not type-casted as heroes since their narrative was rather negative. However, for the black community blacks onscreen was and remains to be a major milestone as they did view the actors to be heroes because they finally made it on the big screen, which is referred back to the success of the American Dream and Upward Mobility. A passage of the Civil Rights act (1964) that marked institutionalized desegregation also marked a significant shift in the consumption, distribution, and production of African American popular culture (Ongiri, p. 8). The shift was prominent in the cultural, social, and political field with its proclamation of a Black aesthetic. Black popular culture shaped the understanding of black identity, community and cultural production. I will provide a framework through the use of examples of films that deal with leadership. Marvel comics and movies are known for some of the most eminent superheroes. Think about characters such as Iron Man, Spider Man, X-Men, Thor, and Doctor Strange. The only issue is that the characters are predominantly white. Marvel does have characters of different origin but these characters do not have a leading role or such as the character Blade only fight a particular crime, in the case of Blade he is a vampire hunter. A hero who possesses various powers and fights crimes in order to save the world from all types of villains was not yet portrayed by someone with an African background. Iron Man (Tony Stark’s alter ego) for example is played by Robert Downey Jr. and has a complete narrative and backstory with several movies in which he makes his appearance to save humanity. This also applies to the other characters I mentioned at the beginning but again no diversity in their origin. There was a need for diversity and in recent years this became visible in other genres as well. The films Straight Outta Compton (2015), Selma (2015), Get Out (2017), and the recent action horror The First Purge (2018) are paradigms of changing perspectives of ethnic representation. The films
illustrate and reference the hardships of African Americans and the ongoing struggle for equality. *The First Purge* is a prequel to the Purge series and the first one to address African American struggles. The film is directed by the African American filmmaker Gerard McMurray. He wanted to focus on the experiences of people of color. It is set on Staten Island, NY, an area that has a large demographic of African Americans and Latinos. The African American way of life is echoed by means of the social struggle and the government’s belief to demolish the lives of African Americans. In the film, black people were trying to escape the government sanctioned ‘purgers’ i.e. people who were allowed to kill. The locals hide in community spaces such as churches to stand together. There were moments when people were wearing blackface masks and white people slaughtered people who were hiding in a church. A scene that was remarkable was when white people showed up as members of the Ku Klux Klan that mirrored the racial violence. It showed not only the horror in the movie but also the horror in African American history. The film is worth mentioning due to the forceful character Dmitri who had some similarities to T’Challa (Black Panther). Dmitri was the hero of the day as he saved people from an apartment that was attacked by the newly formed government NFFA which is an abbreviation for New Founding Fathers of America. *Black Panther* is a marvel movie with a heroic character who protects his nation from infiltrators. The movie is centered around the aspects of heroism as well as the historical and cultural aspects. Black Panther is a superhero in the movie yet also considered a hero in the African American community. They are now able to identify with a black leader which sets the bar for further developments.

Black Panther – whose real name is T’Challa – is the first fictional superhero who is from African descent. The character was created by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. Kirby mentioned in an interview that was taken in 1990 with *The Comics Journal* that the reason behind the creation of Black Panther was the fact that he realized that he did not have any blacks in his strips. He made his debut as a guest appearance in the Marvel Comic *Fantastic Four Vol. 1 #52* (1966). He joined the Avengers in 1968 and made several other appearances in miniseries that ran from 1988 to 1991, 1998 to 2003, 2005 to 2008, and 2009 to 2010. His first own comic strip was published in *Jungle Action Vol. 2, #6-24* (1973-1976) which was written by Don McGregor and drawn by Rich Buckler, Billy Graham and Gil Kane. Black Panther appeared in the new miniseries *Black Panther* (1977-1979) and again made a short appearance in the miniseries *Panther’s Prey* (1990-1991). The Black Panther series went on in the same intermittent manner. It is noticeable that he made various appearances in comic strips but they were interrupted throughout the years. The relaunch of Black Panther comic was written by Ta-Nehisi Coates in
2016 and became one of the bestselling comics of that year. The actor Chadwick Boseman portrayed the role of Black Panther in the Marvel Studios motion pictures and made his first appearance in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). The second appearance was in the 18th movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe named *Black Panther* (2018) and the third appearance was in Marvel’s *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) that is based on the Marvel Comics superhero team. Marvel’s *Black Panther* is more than merely a journey of a superhero, it captures a journey of black culture. The movie can be described as a celebration of black culture due to the representation of powerful blacks and the visual representation of the kingdom of Wakanda. T’Chaka was the ruler of the African kingdom named Wakanda. T’Challa is the son of former King T’Chaka who was murdered when T’Challa was a teenager. He got murdered by a Dutchman who wanted to get a hold of a unique metal referred to as Vibranium that was supplied in Wakanda. T’Challa’s mother passed away in childbirth. Black Panther is a title that was given to the chieftain of the Panther tribe of the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda. Panther’s costume is a symbol of authority and is also used for diplomatic missions. The Black Panther receives his supernatural strength, speed and agility from a special retrieved heart-shaped herb. His uniform and equipment are made from the fictional metal vibranium. Black Panther was affiliated with amalgamated superhero groups Fantastic Four, Avengers, Secret Avengers, Pendragons, Queen’s Vengeance, and former Fantastic Force. T’Challa has a set of brilliant skills that includes being a strategist, scientist, tactician, tracker and a genius of all practices of armed and unarmed combat. His distinctive hybrid fighting style incorporates abilities such as acrobatics and animal mimicry. T’Challa is a royal descendent of a warrior race who is able to use a variety of weapons. He claimed the throne and the mantle that belongs to the Black Panther after his father got murdered by Ulysses Klaue. Furthermore, he is considered to be an excellent planner who is always a step ahead of his opponent and will go to great lengths in order to accomplish his goals and protect the nation of Wakanda. Wakanda is illustrated as a merger of traditional life and futuristic technology, a dichotomy shaped by the presence of the indestructible and rare meteoric ore vibranium.
Marvel Comics is an American publisher of comics that was established by Marvel Entertainment. The company, which initially carried the name Timely Comics, was founded by Martin Goodman in 1939. The company started to produce comics about superheroes in the 1950s. It has now expanded with multiple places of business and is subdivided into several departments. Some of the well-known creators are Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, John Byrne and Chris Claremont. The stories by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee seemed to be the most successful and led to a breakthrough with heroic stories that every person probably knows about such as Iron Man, Spider-Man and Thor. The superhero genre was immensely popular but the company came across a few setbacks before they had a comeback that lasted. The solution to the problem was the establishment of Marvel Enterprises in June 1998 – exactly 20 years ago – which comprised of a variety of products from video games to merchandise apart from comics. Marvel Enterprises (1998-2006) changed its name to Marvel Entertainment, LLC – Limited Liability Company. Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is the overarching term used for the adaptations of Marvel comics to Marvel movies. It is noteworthy that MCU is number one on the list of most successful sequences. MCU films are all produced through Marvel Studios by Marvel Comics and all Marvel Comics take place within the same fictive universe but all characters have a different story –and timeline. The Marvel Universe is a huge multiverse of different worlds that are somehow aligned. It is for the most part based on the real world with real life characteristics such as countries, figures (politicians), and historical events although it also contains fictive elements such as the nation of Wakanda. The Universe also has alternative timelines that allows the characters to travel in time and do not age them. Black Panther appeared in the mainstream American comics as the first superhero of African descent. The Marvel comic debuted before other black superheroes such as the Falcon (1969), Luke Cage (1972) and Blade (1973). Other black actors who got roles in Marvel and DC comics are Halle Berry as Catwoman, Wesley Snipes who plays Blade, Denzel Washington, The character Storm in X-men, and Sam Wilson who was the falcon in Captain America. Black Panther made several other appearances in animated films, videogames and television shows but the first live action image of Black Panther was portrayed in the aforementioned film Captain America: Civil War which was years later. The film after the actual Black Panther film is Avengers: Infinity War (2018) in which Black Panther makes an appearance as member of the avengers. He is essential to this movie because the other members need his help to solve the problems that occur.
The cast of *Black Panther* (2018) is predominantly black which contributes to the celebration of the representation of minority groups. The film is based on the Marvel Comics by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and is directed by Ryan Coogler and written by Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole who are both American of African descent. Well-known actors such as Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Angela Bassett and Forest Whitaker are part of the big production that approximately cost 200 million dollar. The film made over 1 billion dollar profit worldwide solely from theatrical performance. The box office movie broke several records when it comes to its launch and the movie is deemed to be the biggest solo superhero launch of all time, not only in America but worldwide. It already reached numerous milestones within the first two months of its debut. The record-breaking Black Panther’s success is the cause of various reasons. The diverse cast, the representation of women, the influences of African culture, the storyline, and the soundtrack that includes amazing artists. Moreover, it led people to give back to people who live in poverty or were not as fortunate as the majority that could go see the movie in theater. The artist Kendrick Lamar, who is also on the album, is not the only one who bought out an entire movie theater in order for less fortunate families to go to the movies. Another initiative was the Black Panther Challenge, which entailed that money was raised through funding so that underprivileged children were able to experience the superhero movie in a cinema. It sprouted up worldwide and became the most successful GoFundMe campaign in history. A Dutch woman named Glenda van Duivenvoorde also started a fundraiser in the Netherlands with the goal to bring along 250 children to see the action movie. The campaigns and charities could be seen as a reflection of the movie due to the idea of giving back to one’s community and creating a sense of unity.

The analysis of the movie Black Panther will help to understand the storyline and underlying messages that it provides. The fictional Marvel movie is not merely a story of a superhero, it is also a story of African culture and history. I intend to show that it affects the representation of African Americans as I will analyze the contribution of the changes in portrayal. Moreover, the movie will be examined with the help of the book Film Art: An Introduction by Bordwell and Thompson. It is going to function as a guideline to interpret the movie in the film style mise-en-scene, “of all the techniques of cinema, mise-en-scene is the one with which we are most familiar” (Bordwell and Thompson, p. 112). To recall camera movements or specific sounds after seeing a film might be difficult yet the imprinted memories that the viewer has are often centered on mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene is French for putting into the scene and is used to signify the control a director has over the film frame. He does this by staging the event for the camera. The decisions on lighting, costume, setting and the behavior of figures are aspects of the style mise-en-scene (p. 112). It is of importance to analyze the functions in the film – “how it is motivated, how it varies or develops, how it works in relation to other film techniques” (p. 113). There are four general ideas to the possibilities for selection and control of mise-en-scene, namely, costumes and makeup, lighting, setting, and staging (p. 115). Bordwell et al. state that the overall design can shape how the viewer understands the story action (p. 117). Performances also have an impact on the visual elements and sound and due to the fact that cinema functions as an art of time and space, the control of a director over mise-en-scene manages what the viewer sees as well as when and for how long they see it. The analysis is guided by questions vis-à-vis elements of mise-en-scene such as how do they function? How do they constitute motifs? How is mise-en-scene patterned in space and time?

I attempted to analyze Black Panther (2018) in a sophisticated manner, searching for historical and cultural artefacts concerning African Americans. The film illustrated traditional African artefacts and included historical references such as dialogues that indirectly addressed the hardships of African Americans throughout history. The reason behind this is to create a better picture of what the movie added to the representation of a superhero who is from African descent and the overall representation of the African community. It is also a groundbreaking movie for the inclusion of variety. Although other movies have managed to depict variety, this particular movie remains historical for its own genre and how it affected numerous viewers worldwide. The film was a statement for people of color that finally arrived in the 21st century.
The beginning of the movie describes how a warrior became king and received the title of Black Panther sovereign of the nation of Wakanda. Wakanda is a fusion of modern technology and traditional life. The Wakandans used the rare metal vibranium to develop technology that was more advanced than any other nation. In order to keep vibranium safe they tried to hide it in plain sight to keep the truth from power from the outside wealth as they also wanted to use it for a better purpose than combat. Wakandans follow the policy of no usage of weapons for war. It implies that a third world country is not a weak and unstable place but that it obtains strength and progression. The film continues with the representation of a ghetto neighborhood in Oakland where black children are playing basketball, which is a common and identifiable image of blacks in film. A print screen of the neighborhood is inserted below. The mise-en-scene style is noticeable through the angle of the shot and the depiction of the apartment where T’Challa’s uncle resides which is seen in the following scene. It is dark outside but I also believe it has to do with the dark event that will take place in the next scene.

Heir prince T’Challa is immediately represented as strong in his first scene as he takes upon the role of saving kidnapped females. In that same scene, Nakia (Lupita Nyong’o) and general Okoye present a strong sense of female empowerment as they fight for justice and against villains. They are portrayed as strong, loyal and intellectual who cannot be missed in society. Shuri is T’Challa’s sister and is a female master of tech and science who happened to create the suit for Black Panther. She is a witty and smart person who can fix anything from a person to shoes. The Dora Milaje is an all-female front led by general Okoye to battle against villains and throughout the film they represent what should not be surprising; strong individuals. Women were and still are a minority group in American motion pictures and are generally underrepresented, however, this movie also shed light on how females are inevitable and innately strong.
In the frame below, Shuri uses her skills to make her brother T’Challa the perfect Black Panther costume. In the frame next to it the females try to take out Killmonger. In both print screens, mise-en-scene is used to create curiosity and the filmmaker places the characters who are relevant in a simple compositional balance. The balance here is to center the human bodies of the performers and its objects, and minimizing side elements. Movement is another important facet that creates depth cues. Depth cues are part of a multiple scenes in the movie and entails that space has volume and planes, i.e. layers of space occupied by persons or objects (p. 145).

T’Challa goes back to Wakanda in a futuristic spaceship in which he flies above the nation filled with nature but also contrasted with technological developments such as high buildings. The viewer follows the craft to the ultimate destination Wakanda as the filmmaker draw the attention to the nation of Wakanda. Another scene depicts the advancement of Wakanda through the enormous section where vibranium is being transported by wagons. The emphasis is on the screen space and colors to depict a territory occupied with speed movement. Bordwell et al. explain that “the fact that our vision is sensitive to differences allows filmmakers to guide our understanding of the mise-en-scene. All the cues to story space interact with one another, working to emphasize narrative elements, direct our attention, and set up dynamic relations among areas of screen space” (p. 148).
Director Coogler highlights the psychic and physical scars of the legacy of slavery and how African Americans had to tolerate and cope with the actual consequences of it up until present day. The perspective of Erik Killmonger played by Michael B. Jordan is one that the black community can identify with. Killmonger delivers a few strong statements in the film that are a focal point to the rage regarding how black people across the world including himself have been disenfranchised and disempowered. In the scene where Michael B. Jordan makes his entrance, Erik Killmonger is checking out artefacts from Africa in an American museum gallery which is part of the historical representation. A conversation follows between a woman who is an employee and Killmonger. The conversation clearly states where he stands on the issue: The white woman says: “these items aren’t for sale”, Erik replies with “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?” The dialogue has an underlying message to the history of white superiority and black suppression. He goes on by saying: “you got all this security in here watching me ever since I walked in.” (Source: Black Panther, 2018). The last remark is something that people of color tend to deal with when they find themselves in a similar situation. A frame with Michael B. Jordan could be explained in terms of mise-en-scene as an enhancement of the actor’s performance, style and dialogue.

The incredible scene in which prince T’Challa will be sworn in as king embraces traditional features. Various tribes are singing and cheering for their soon to be king. The tribes perform traditional dances with traditional attire that also has beads on it. The tribes have painted their faces and each tribe has their specific colors and costumes. From which tribe they are can be verified by the color scheme and symbols. Furthermore, the support of music, instruments and sounds create a sense of community. They are all yelling out the name of T’Challa and also the term ‘kamaku’ which means praise the ancestors. The scene is one of many scenes that provide the audience with elements of African culture. Different ceremonies, different accents but one overarching culture that is referred to as black but has lively colors. The colors vary from purple to yellow with a plane background that fits the description of mise-
en-scene because color is more vibrant with a neutral background. The specific color scheme and costumes become more prominent in this manner. Bordwell and Thompson suggest that in cinema, “lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions” (p. 124).

T’Challa was challenged by another chieftain M’Baku – T’Challa wins and becomes king – but this is also a cultural theme. The pride of Wakanda is eminent with the declaration of ‘Wakanda forever’ and the sign that Wakandans make for being part of a tribe culture. The movie uses African terms and attire, they depict nature and the African way of life by the visuals of farmers on the one hand and modernity (buildings) on the other. Another facet is the reoccurring phrase of who are you in their African dialect that implies that everyone has an identity. Furthermore, the sound effects throughout the movie actually makes the audience feel a part of the whole experience. The fact that the movie came out a few months after the introduction of 4DX cinemas in the Netherlands for example strengthens the level of involvement. The print screen inserted below is a representation of the traditional African life.
A notable feature of the film is the predominantly black cast and two important supporting acts played by white men. A contrary view in this movie is that the black superhero and a black character attack the white villain. Killmonger is successful in defeating Ulysses Klaue and brings his body to Wakanda. After his arrival in Wakanda, Killmonger fights T’Challa and gets a hold of the throne for a little while. He becomes King N’Jdaka and makes another important remark as an emigrant from America to Africa: “You know where I’m from, black folks started the revolution, and they never had the fire power or the resources to fight their oppressors.”

Everett Ross is another character who is CIA and helps Black Panther and his nation. Ross is startled once he is exposed to the science that Wakanda has to offer. Once Shuri cured him, he stayed in Wakanda and helped against attacks. Shuri and Everett had a dialogue where Shuri made a comment toward him: “Don’t scare me like that colonizer.” The comment speaks for itself and stems back to the colonization era. In another scene, M’Baku and the Jabari tribe ‘barked’ at Ross when he was trying to speak. It was a funny yet serious expression that indicated a reversed attitude toward white people. The bark might suggest the inhumane actions of how whites treated blacks.

In the last few scenes Killmonger and T’Challa held dialogues that are significant for the African American representation in this particular film. T’Challa takes it up with Erik that results in Erik being harmed. The event led to the following conversation between the two of them. T’Challa: “Maybe we can still heal you.” Erik responds to this in a momentous fashion that hits a viewer in the feels: “Why? So you can just lock me up? Nah. Just bury me in the ocean with my ancestors that jumped from the ships because they knew death was better than bondage.” (Black Panther, 2018). After he said those words, he passed away. These are such strong remarks that left a huge impact behind to me as a viewer. The words that he uttered are not merely words, they are an expression of the hardships of African Americans. As is always the case with Marvel Studios’ movies, a final scene is added after the credits of the movie. The very last scene is set in a conference room where T’Challa holds his speech on matters such as
Wakanda as a place of sharing knowledge and resources. However, the interpretation of the message is more than solely about the fictional Wakanda. The speech is as follows: “We will work to be an example of how we as brothers and sisters on this earth should treat each other. Now more than ever. The illusions of the vision threaten or very existence. We all know the truth. More connects us than separates us. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe.” (Black Panther, 2018)

Black Panther has set the bar of cinematography by joining the Diaspora. The waterfall challenge shows off different tribes of Wakanda who are gathered in celebratory attire respective of their culture. The tribes are not in existence in the real world, however, the clothing and aesthetics that were used do come from existing African nations. The impressive looks give off an Afro-futuristic vibe yet there are also traditional pieces worn by various characters. A few of these items will be mentioned below for reference. Angela Bassett plays T’Challa’s mother Ramonda, she is wearing an isicholo in the scene where she makes her first appearance. An isicholo is a hat worn traditionally for married women who are part of the Zulu women in South Africa. The hat is made with basket weaving techniques. A kente is another traditional piece that belongs to the Akan in Ghana. It is a sacred cloth of which the color signifies a specific meaning and is a distinct item worn on special occasions. Women in the movie were also seen with a traditional head wrap called gele, a piece that is part of the Nigerian culture. T’Challa’s father T’Chaka who already passed away wears this in the scene where they meet in the afterlife. Scenes that display the city offers the viewer an image of people wearing garments that are worn in several countries in the continent – the dashiki is perhaps the best known costume from West Africa (Benin, Togo). A kanzu is a jacket and jumpsuit that are supposed to be joint and resembles a robe. The kanzu is worn by Ugandan men and its color is typically white or cream. The West African suit called Agbada is worn by men and is also supposed to be joint as it has a matching top, pants and hat. The attire is intended for formal
events. The last item is the Basotho blankets which are wool blankets from the Kingdom of Lesotho and each design has a meaning. Moreover, it is historical as it is connected to the colonizers of the southern part of Africa. In the film, these blankets were used during battles by the character W"Kabi and his army.

An article by ELLE magazine provides insight into the feeling of black empowerment as they interviewed visitors of *Black Panther* (2018) in theater. Chloe Hall and Mariel Tyler spoke to the viewers about what the film means to them. Various reasons came up such as that someone black could now win an Oscar for portraying a role that entails something more than being a slave. They would win for being smart, successful and strong. In other words, it is something positive instead of negative for once. Another person said that it is eminent considering the political climate of Americans and that African Americans have a strong history of overcoming. Someone also mentioned that she finds it exciting to see someone that looks like her on a big screen who is also a superhero. Visitors see it as refreshing, positive representation and want to show support to such a huge African Americans production.
Chapter 4. Hip hop and Music Album

Every hero needs theme music is what Keenan Ivory Wayans said who played a hero in the Blaxploitation movie I’m Gonna Get You Sucka (1988). This was true for the African American heroes of the struggle for injustice (Ongiri, p. 124). Ongiri continues by saying that “African American music in turn has also repeatedly thematized heroism, tying it to collective action for social change to the extent that the struggle for social change has been reflected in every genre of every period of African American music” (124). Music, in particular hip hop, is an art form that holds an important part in African American history as it was used to express their emotions. Hip hop started as a social movement in the 20th century and is an amalgamation of the elements graffiti, breakdance, DJ’ing, and rap. Hip hop is an instrument that helps yield replications and re-imaginations of experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates urban space (Rose, p. 22). The aim of the movement is to shape their own identity and they also seek to mark their territory. Sounds, lyrics, and themes are elements that contribute to giving them a voice in order to be heard. "Hip hop emerges from complex cultural exchanges and larger social and political conditions of disillusionment and alienation" (Rose, p. 59). Minority groups felt a need to express themselves due to the constant political and social tensions. Rap is the most common form of art, a type of poetry that is associated with the music genre of hip hop. It is a distinguishable genre due to the fact that it is considered to be a style of oral protest against the wrongdoings African Americans have had to withstand. The compilation of music from and inspired by Marvel’s Black Panther (2018), comprises of music genres such as soul, pop, R&B, and hip hop that are an addition to the variety of the sonic palette. Coogler screened some of the footage of the movie for Kendrick Lamar as the initial plan was to record one original song. However, what was supposed to be one song turned into a whole album due to the enthusiasm of both Coogler and Lamar. Coogler was drawn to the work and achievements of Lamar. His newest release Damn was a Grammy-winning album with personal thoughts on the costs of black achievement in an America led by Donald Trump. It was therefore no surprise that director Ryan Coogler asked Kendrick Lamar to curate the soundtrack. Kendrick Lamar is an eminent rapper in the industry known for his meaningful lyrics. Opps, Pray for Me, and All the Stars are titles of the songs that made an appearance in the film itself. The rest of the songs are as already mentioned in the title, inspired by the film.
"Black Panther: The Album – Music from and inspired by" is the soundtrack album for the movie. Kendrick Lamar and Top Dawg Entertainment founder Anthony Tiffith produced the album that features a variety of artists. It was released a week prior to the release of the movie along with another separate album "Black Panther (Original Score)", composed by Ludwig Göransson. Both albums were released by Interscope Records in February, 2018. Director Ryan Coogler was the one to choose Kendrick Lamar for the album project for the reason that his artistic themes are aligned with the subjects in the movie. The soundtrack debuted at number one on the US hit chart Billboard 200. The album complimented the movie "Black Panther" with black performers and relevant lyrics. All the Stars by Kendrick Lamar and ZSA, I Am performed by Jorja Smith, Redemption by Zacari and Babes Wodumo and Pray for Me performed by Lamar and The Weeknd are a few tracks on the album. All the Stars is played at the end of the movie and is an example of an uplifting song with a chorus that goes as follows "this maybe the night that my dreams might let me know, all the stars are closer, all the stars are closer. This maybe the night that my dreams might let me know, all the stars are closer, all the stars are closer. This maybe the night that my dreams might let me know, all the stars are closer, all the stars are closer, all the stars are closer, all the stars are closer" (Tiffith et al., 2018). Redemption is a song on the album with South African gqom house beats with hints of pop from Zacari, and in Zulu from the South African singer Babes Wodumo. In the intro of the song Lamar raps "two wrongs do not make us right away." Mozzy remarks "trey try to tell us that we all equal, we get no justice so it ain’t peaceful." Lamar ends the song with a statement "one world, one God, one family," which is a celebration of unity. "Black Panther (Original Score)" is another collaboration between Göransson and Coogler. It is an homage to traditional African music and its culture. He visited South Africa to find inspiration and listened to music styles of numerous tribes in Africa. He had to incorporate these musical elements in the orchestra production to make the compositions. The tracks were being played during different moments in the movie such as the waterfall fight, the casino brawl, the challenge between T’Challa and Killmonger. The track list is comprised of 28 songs in total and the track list of the previously
mentioned album contains 14 songs. The album is worthwhile mentioning because it serves as an additional source to the representation of the African culture, and it is an arrangement by the talented African American artists who worked on the album. With contributions from international artists such as American rapper Future, Jorja Smith from England, and Sjava from South Africa the album is also a combination of black people working together to form an excellent piece of art.

The film featured memorable and subtle moments and messages, not solely through dialogues but also with the aid of music elements. It should be mentioned that both albums enhanced the messages by supporting different scenes in the movie. On the song Pray for Me, artists Kendrick Lamar and The Weeknd epitomize the perspective of T’Challa by means of what it entails to be a hero and what it takes to protect the ones he loves. Pray for Me sets the mood for a scene that shows characters T’Challa, Nakia, and Okoye who join forces to fight against Klaue for the vibranium. A cinematic piano is played during the action scene in preparation for the next song Opps, performed by Yugen Blakrok and Vince Staples. Opps takes the viewer through the intense chase to catch Klaue. A print screen of the scene where the trio visits the casino to get their hands on Ulysses Klaue is inserted below:

![Scene from Black Panther](image)

The soundtrack along with the album carry a well put together example of a changing era of African American representation in Hollywood. Both film and music reinforce the narratives and point of views of the story. It guides the viewer through different stages of the narrative and the overall storytelling. Songs on the album adopt the voices of T’Challa and Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan). An example of this is the opening title track where Kendrick voices criticism from T’Challa’s viewpoint “a nervous, sparse litany about being torn apart by competing forces, with a swarm of voices dissonantly asking, “What do you stand for? Are you an activist? ... Are you an accident? Are you just in the way?” Soundtracks are used in Marvel movies but the difference of Black Panther’s soundtrack lies in the fact that it does not
incorporate existing work. The music that was created for this movie is new and each segment becomes something greater than solely a scene as it mimics the aesthetics of the film.

In the first scene a male protagonist tells the tale of Wakanda to his son. The music that is played are typical African music elements. In the second scenes the viewer is taken back in time to Oakland, California in the year 1992. The sound of an old-school hip hop beat can be heard in the background as black kids are playing basketball on the court. This scene is significant due to the stereotypical portrayal of hip hop in combination with black youngsters playing basketball. Furthermore, there is a connection to the Black Panther Party and the hip hop era with the reference of a Public Enemy poster in N’Jobu’s (Erik’s father) apartment next to the outside court, and the fact that the Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, CA. T’Challa and Nakia are reunited in the scene where the viewer is introduced to the crowded market in Wakanda. Berebere is the name of the song that accompanies the scene, it is a single on the second album performed by Idrissa Soumaor and Ali Farka Toure and composed by Ludwig Göransson. The song is recognizable due to the exultant sounds that echo the ambience of superhero movie but with an ancillary mixture of horns and drums to boost African sounds.

The singles and other musical elements are heard throughout the film, which breaks the boundary of music and film in the sense that music uplifts the message of the film. Hip hop is a reference point for African Americans in the real world and in that respect can also be applied to Black Panther and the fictive world of Wakanda.
Conclusion

It is inequivocal that African Americans are underrepresented in American motion pictures in general and in this specific case in Marvel Studios films. In a country that consists of a multifaceted population it is vital to include this same variety on screen. The necessity for people to relate to characters is not well-understood by people who do not have the same issue since they have been exposed to a considerate amount of representation of themselves onscreen. Throughout history, films have been a cultural reflection of the way other ethnicities were viewed. It is apparent that the portrayal started with suppression as a result of the misrepresented black community and that there is an upward trend due to the way they fought for justice and made their way into Hollywood. The recent developments in American motion pictures indicate that the historical and cultural representation of African Americans have been more positive with the aid of movies that have an opposing view compared to earlier movies. Moreover, recent developments show that directors integrate themes that refer to the African American hardships.

As far as the American Dream, the journey to freedom has made quite a progress which is visible with the release of *Black Panther*, Marvel’s first African American superhero as a protagonist. It has been a long, hard road for African Americans but movies such as *Black Panther* proved Upward Mobility.

The representation of a superhero in the movie is similar to that of previous superheroes yet it shows great advancements in the portrayal of a strong black protagonist along with cultural and historical artefacts that enhances the African culture and customs. The background seamlessly depicts the African way of life. As for other movies mentioned in the thesis, these are equally an addition to the new era of filmmaking that embraces diversity. Thus, the status of African Americans in a heroic role has changed over the last few years. The in-depth analysis of *Black Panther* elucidates in what manner African American are portrayed. The African features such as traditions and music are thoroughly framed with mise-en-scene and are highlighted in various fragments. The analysis confirms that the representation of African Americans has changed with the support of explicit use of African elements and dialogues that refer to African American history. A black superhero in a leading role is a major milestone for the black community because it is more than a fictional superhero. It might be said that it is more so a symbolic superhero than a stereotypical hero who proliferates a sense of recognition and belonging. *Black Panther* (2018) proves to be a groundbreaking movie that affected the film industry as well as the audience. It is a film that celebrates African heritage and recognizes the struggles they have had to overcome since they set foot on American soil. *Black Panther* is
a precedent for a positive outlook on the representation of African Americans in film and television. The divergent aspects that the film discussed are components of a major step in the right direction and gives the viewer a better understanding of the history of people of African descent. The inclusion of visual and musical elements contributed to the progressive portrayal. After answering the sub-questions concerning developments, African American characters, and the film analysis it can be concluded that Black Panther encompasses all rudiments for a successful narrative that contributes to the changing portrayal of African Americans. The movie with its underlying message has had a positive influence on American screen and society. Hopefully, this will set an example for future cinematography as well as real life changes in relation to diversity and equality.

The implications of this research were the fact that Black Panther (2018) came out in February, which entails that it was difficult to find academic articles about the movie. I was not able to scrutinize all of the facets in the movie or go in-depth with respect to the broad spectrum of material the movie provided. It was also fairly difficult to find relevant sources that deal with black superheroes. The possibilities for further research are to take a closer look at the representation of different Marvel and DC characters and compare them to each other. The characters can vary from ethnic background to gender. The development and portrayal of minority groups would be an extension to this research.
Works Cited


