

Black Heroes Matter

In the comic book world, there are numerous superheroes that swoop, swing, fly, and jump in to save the day from the evil villains. Out of the numerous heroes how many of them are African American heroes? Only a select few African American characters have been in the spotlight of their own comic book stories. Black Panther was first introduced in July 1966 in *Fantastic Four* no. 52 as T'Challa gifts the team a spacecraft as an invitation to his country of Wakanda. They are skeptical at first as quoted in an article by Micah Peters, "The team is suspicious of someone from Africa having nice things, just like many white Americans would be in the 1960s" (Peters, "The Evolution Of Marvel's 'Black Panther'"). Upon their arrival they are attacked by Black Panther as a test before asking for their help in a grave task. Luke Cage was introduced in June of 1972 in *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire* as this was during the growing popularity for blaxploitation films. Luke became the first black superhero to star in their own comic book series.

However, the world of comics has many black superheroes who mostly added as a sidekick for the main hero such as Falcon to Captain America, Storm to Cyclops from X-Men, and even Miles Morales to Spider-Man. While Falcon became the first mainstream black superhero when introduced in 1969 as Captain America's second hand man. Storm was introduced in 1975 and became one of the first black members of the X-Men only to be a sidekick to the group as the main trio of the team was highlighted in the comics. Then comes Miles Morales in 2006 as the first black character to take the Spider-man mantle after the death of Peter Parker (Ultimate universe). Miles has a history of being put in the sidekick position

during crossover events where he goes into a different dimension to help Peter with a end of the world crisis.

Films have given the spotlight to black superheroes who can hold their own in the box office as their Anglo counterparts and have helped bring more popularity. We have seen “Black Panther” break records for the month of February in 2018 as an all black cast brought the world of Wakanda and the struggles T’Challa faced as he took the role of King of Wakanda. Fast forward a few months later to December of 2018 and we get the animated feature of “Spider-Man: Into the Spider Verse” where we see Miles Morales become the Spider-Man of his universe. The films each deal with a specific struggle that affects African American society while telling the story of African American superheroes.

“Black Panther” deals with the struggle African Americans have when trying to have a relationship with their ancestral lands of Africa. The film uses its world building, construction of a world that is fictional, to deliver this social commentary. “Spider-Man: Into the Spider Verse” uses its animations to tell Miles’s story while commenting on the imposter syndrome which is common in the black community. As stated by Jeremy Bauer-Wolf in his article about imposter syndrome, “Those who suffer from impostor feelings cannot grasp or believe in their successes, even if they’re high achieving” (Bauer-Wolf, “Feeling Like Imposters”). Originally, Imposter syndrome affected women in 1970s until becoming more common within the Latino and African American communities.

“Black Panther” is about a young king that has to become the new king of Wakanda after the assassination of his father. The story follows T’Challa who becomes the next Black Panther,

the protector of Wakanda, as he struggles to find a balance between being a king like his father or to be a different king altogether. After a robbery of an artifact at the British museum, T'Challa is forced to leave his country to protect the secret of their countries wealth. This leads to them crossing paths with Killmonger, a black ops specialist with a secret past, and the reason for Wakanda's foundation and beliefs being destroyed. This leads to a climactic battle that overall changes the world of Wakanda and T'Challa as a king. This are the key events that help demonstrate the division between T'Challa and Erik as they each are Wakandan, but their different upbringings cause this division as Wakanda does not want Erik to exist.

To understand the hero epic of T'Challa into the role of the Black Panther, you have to learn about the world building of Wakanda and its history throughout the fictional history in the world. In the film, The history is given to the audience through a visual of Vibranium dust that shifts to mimic the story being told by our narrator. Wakanda was a country blessed by a meteorite filled with Vibranium that struck it and altered the wildlife around them. After a bit of battles between the five tribes of Wakanda, a warrior was show a vision from their panther god, Bas, who helped the warrior find the heart-shaped herb that granted them super-human strength and became the first Black Panther. Once becoming the Black Panther he brings order to Wakanda and with the help of Vibranium developed their country with advances in technology. As they progressed the world around them fell into chaos as colonizers started taking Africans for slavery and they hide from the world through their use of their advanced technology.

The first visual of Wakanda is after a retrieval mission for T'Challa's love interest, Nakia, and we are shown their holographic forest to protect the world from seeing their advanced

world. Once they pass through the world of Wakanda is shown by their fusion of African culture to urban living. You see tall buildings that incorporate hut type architecture to their buildings which plays a part in how the culture of Wakanda is as a society. Wakanda has people who enjoy their culture and tradition while you have the younger generations looking towards a new tradition in the foreseeing future. The main examples are the sibling relationship between T'Challa and his sister Shuri as T'Challa is all about following tradition meanwhile Shuri is about moving into the future with tradition.

Wakandan Culture

Their culture is a mixture of Western African cultures that would surround the fictional country of Wakanda. The different tribes that live in Wakanda demonstrate the different body modification that are a norm in African cultures in the whole continent of Africa. The film is heavily influenced by the different aspects of Western African culture such as the body modification, hair styles, and jewelry. An article written by Lynsey Chutel and Yomi Kazeem titled, "Marvel's 'Black Panther' is a broad mix of African cultures—here are some of them" talk about the many countries which helped influence each tribe and the everyday culture of Wakandans.

The Merchant Tribe had the many examples of jewelry that are made of natural materials such as jades, amber and other stones each handcrafted with silver. This is a type known as *Tuareg* jewelry best used in Algeria, Mali, and Niger. The Border Tribe have skin scars around the bottom of their eyes and curving up their cheek bone. The body modification is known for

the many kills a warrior had as demonstrated by Killmonger later in the film and interesting enough W'Kabi is the only one from the border tribe to have these scars. However, this goes with how the Border Tribe's clothing is influenced by the Basotho people as they are located in Lesotho, a mountainous country. The blankets of the Basotho people hold deep significance as stated by Chutel and Kazeem because the symbols on the blankets have meaning. "The most prestigious being a corn cob found on the *seanamarena*, meaning 'to swear by the chiefs'", in the film the Border Tribe have Wakandan symbols and technology infused together to give them blanket cloaks that turn them from farmers to warriors (Chutel and Kazeem, "Marvel's 'Black Panther' is a broad mix of African cultures—here are some of them"). One final touch is their excellent skills as riders like the Basotho people are great riders of horse the Border Tribe are skilled at riding rhinos.

The Mining Tribe's head chief has a hairstyle that represents the people of Namibia who wear distinctive locks. The locks are "sculpted in *otjize* paste, made of butter, fat, red ochre and scented with herbal aromatics, ovaHimba plait or twist their hair into thick locks." The River Tribe chief is shown having a lip plate that is a cultural aspect for the country of Ethiopia. "Lip plates are drawn from the culture of the *Mursi* and are also seen among *Chai* and *Tirma*, for whom it is a source of pride and also identity", stated Chutel and Kazeem. The only difference is in Black Panther the lip plate is worn by a man, but in the *Mursi* culture, "lip plates are typically worn by women" (Chutel and Kazeem, "Marvel's 'Black Panther' is a broad mix of African cultures—here are some of them").

The Panther Tribe, which is the royal family T'Challa is from, has his female warrior squad of bodyguards known as the Dora Milaje which have an interesting background. The Dora Milaje is believed to be inspired by real-life version of female soldiers which “existed from the 1600s in Dahomey and were known as the ‘Dahomey Amazons’ who fought wars for the kingdom against colonial French forces” (Chutel and Kazeem, “Marvel’s ‘Black Panther’ is a broad mix of African cultures—here are some of them”). While the comics they were originally a group of perspective wives that showed how they can be a suitable wife for T'Challa, they were later changed to be the king's noble warrior protection.

This the cultural life that T'Challa has lived with his entire which influence the kind of king he wants to be, but struggles whenever he has to face his greatest enemy, Killmonger. T'Challa and Killmonger, Erik, are two sides of the same coin as they are both Wakandan yet have difference in their lives. T'Challa had a life filled with his beautiful sunsets of Wakanda and Erik had to live in a oppressed community in the United States. In the film, Erik only learned about his culture through his father's stories as like the opening visuals where the audience learn about the history of Wakanda.

Erik/Killmonger

The line that the child says, “And we still hide *Baba*... why?” is a double meaning line because the audience first believe the line is from T'Challa and his father T'Chaka and why Wakanda is still hiding their wealth and resources from the world. However, the line is why Erik and his father N'Jobu hide their crimes from Wakanda as it is later revealed that he helped Klaw

steal their Vibranium which killed many Wakandans in the process. The birth of Erik was also a somewhat crime because he was of Wakandan and American blood which is stated when Erik is in the ancestral plain and his father says the Wakandans won't accept him because they will simply say, "You are lost." (01:27:10-01:27:30). This is a topic for discussion as stated by Brooke Obie in "In Defense Of Erik Killmonger And The Forgotten Children Of Wakanda" on why Killmonger is the character he is in the film.

The article starts by using a quote by James Baldwin, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all the time" (Obie, "In Defense Of Erik Killmonger And The Forgotten Children Of Wakanda") Director Ryan Coogler was conscious about making this the topic for discussion through his careful writing of the tragic character of Killmonger. The film starts in Oakland in 1992, which is important to the story as the audience is shown the prolific police brutality of an unarmed man known as Rodney King, a black man who was brutally beaten by officers at a traffic stop in 1992. To have Killmonger growing up in an environment like this because of how in our society we have a binary identity when it comes to being African American. The audience learn later towards the second act of the film of how Erik was the child left behind in Oakland after T'Challa's father killed his father. Like the quote by James Baldwin states that being black in this country and conscious is to be in a stage of rage all the time because of all the horrors the black community has dealt with to live in these United States.

The rage shown in Killmonger is the anger of being abandoned by the country he has heard vividly through his father only for the country to take his own father away and live on his

own. We learn briefly through Agent Ross about his upbringings as he graduated MIT and joined the military to becoming a special black ops squadron that specializes in infiltrating and destroying countries government from the inside. Killmonger has lived his whole life waiting for the day when he could go to Wakanda and bring it down to its knees for taking everything he has ever loved. This opportunity comes in the form of the switch of power from T'Chaka to T'Challa as he had to replace his father after his death.

Erik follows in his father's footsteps as he works with Klaue to steal vibranium and sell to the highest bidder, but like his father he is not interested in the money as he is more interested in making sure vibranium is used to help the oppressed. In a flashback, the audience learns about how N'Jobu helped Klaue to steal vibranium from Wakanda because he wanted to help the African American population fight back against their oppressors. Erik wants the same thing, but first wants to take down the kingdom by taking the throne and changing the way Wakanda delegates in terms of foreign aid. This is evident when Killmonger takes the throne and demonstrates his hatred towards the colonizers by stating how he has learned their ways and they are going to beat them at their own game. However, his ascension on the throne is mostly welcomed with uneasy facial expressions as he is seen as an outsider who is destroying their traditions in the process towards his end goal of expanding the Wakandan Empire. This goes with what his father told him in the ancestral plain about how they will say he is lost as he is not truly Wakandan even though he carries their signature look of their tattoo'd bottom lip.

In the article by Obie, she says, "the imprint of the continent our ancestors hailed from is embedded in our gums, but our Ancestry DNA results don't exactly lead us into the open arms of

our ancestral cousins” (Obie, “In Defense Of Erik Killmonger And The Forgotten Children Of Wakanda”). Erik is never truly welcomed even after everything he does to fix with the culture of Wakanda from his body modification and learning the language, but he is never truly welcomed into the motherland. The issue at hand is in today’s America, African Americans have a struggle with trying to be figure out their identity as they want to learn and experience their ancestral culture that was taken from them from years of slavery. However, the problem is that Africans don’t see them as one of their own because of their upbringings in the Americas instead of Africa. In the article, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngzoi Adichie talks about the word “Black” which isn’t a concept in Africa. “Rightfully, ethnic groups have their own languages, cultures, histories, and traditions” (Obie, “In Defense Of Erik Killmonger And The Forgotten Children Of Wakanda”). This goes along with how Erik is an unwelcomed citizen of Wakanda even if he does have their culture pumping through his veins. He goes to ask T’Challa a chilling question about race, “Not your own? But didn’t life start right here on this continent? So ain’t all people your people?” to which T’Challa replies with, “I’m not king of all people. I’m King of Wakanda.” (01:14:20-01:15:10).

The line T’Challa replies is something he struggles with throughout the film as he is getting ready to take the throne after his father. We have learned about Erik/Killmonger’s American life as a Wakandan, but the film follows T’Challa’s hero epic overall. He wants to do go through his country while also thinking about helping the outside world as they have the tools and technology to help the entire world.

T'Challa/Black Panther

T'Challa throughout the film goes back and forth about how to help Wakanda when Wakandan artifacts end up in the world. Especially through his relationship with Nakia who is constantly telling him to do more foreign aid to help the world by sharing Wakanda's resources. Once he is near the brink of death he realizes the problems that his father committed was leaving Erik alone after killing his father. This is the start of T'Challa's decision to help the world with the help of his sister Shuri to build an outreach home in Oakland (02:00:35-02:01:50).

T'Challa is the other side of Killmonger in terms of identity as Killmonger is the African American identity and T'Challa is the African ancestry he was robbed of experiencing. T'Challa grew up in a healthy environment where crime is not as frequent in Wakanda as it is in America and he grew in a household of two parents rather than a broken home as an orphan. Crime in Wakanda is as small as outsiders trying to enter their country and discovering their secret or their lost artifacts (usually containing vibranium) being discovered. T'Challa has hints of an artistic movement called Afrofuturism which is defined by Carvell Wallace in his article. The quote, "Afrofuturism is, if nothing else, an attempt to imagine what that home would be. 'Black Panther' cannot help being part of this. 'Wakanda itself is a dream state,' says the director Ava DuVernay, 'a place that's been in the hearts and minds and spirits of black people since we were brought here in chains.'" (Wallace, "Why 'Black Panther' is a Defining Moment for Black America). T'Challa lives in a perfect world that he is afraid to see the outcome of helping others rather than his own people.

It is this same fear that resulted in the anger of Killmonger's ideology of extremist annihilation of the colonizers. T'Challa has demonstrated his morale as he chooses multiple times to care for other people rather than his nation. He chooses to save the life of Agent Ross because as he states, "I cannot stand by and watch him die knowing we could save him" (01:00:20-01:00:51). He wants to help others as he knows Wakanda can help many nations, but he is constantly being advice to not help by his close friend W'Kabi. In a small conversation they have, W'Kabi tells him, "You let the refugees in they bring their problems with them. And then Wakanda is like everywhere else" (00:35:00-00:35:20). Then there is Okoye who is reluctant to bring Ross to Wakanda as she states, "It is his duty to report back to his country" (01:00:20-01:00:51). T'Challa has yet to make a decision that is his own without having his closest allies close to his ear.

The final act of the film is when see T'Challa have a realization that he is going to be a different king than his father and his predecessors. The first was the inclusion of asking for M'Baku's help by giving him an army to counter Killmonger's. He is the first king to fight against his own people as seen in the final battle where Killmonger has an army of Wakandans who blindly follow his ideology and those loyal to T'Challa. This ultimately ends in a one on one fight between both Black Panthers; T'Challa in his Black Panther and Erik in T'Chaka's Black Panther with gold outlines.

Their fight is a battle of the past and future as Erik is wearing T'Chaka's suit that was used to kill his father back when he was a child. This is view of T'Challa becoming his own king as he fights the ghost of his father, the true villain of this Wakanda's demise. Upon able to get

the upper hand against Killmonger and stabbing him before his suit could protect him is T'Challa's one of the final nails in the coffin to erase the past of his father's mistake. Once Erik is accepting the fact that he has been defeated he has a heart to heart with his cousin about how his father told him about Wakanda's "most beautiful sunset" (01:57:05-01:58:20). T'Challa takes him to see one final sunset in his ancestral nation before removing the blade from his chest after stating, "bury me in the ocean with my ancestors that jumped from ships 'cause they knew death was better than bondage" (01:57:05-01:58:20). Erik's tragic upbringing to his death are the final influences that shape T'Challa into become the king we see at the end of the film.

As stated above, Shuri and him go to Oakland and stand outside the building where their uncle was killed by their father. He tells Shuri about him purchasing the building to form an outreach home to help the youths like Erik to have a better environment. He even mentions other buildings he bought to have a science division that Shuri will be in charge who is surprised, but T'Challa removes the cloaking on their aircraft for the local kids to admire in amazement. His final decision that is the final nail on the coffin of rewriting his father's mistake is announcing at a summit of nations about Wakanda opening its doors to help the world. He tells the summit, "And for the first time in our history we will be sharing our knowledge and resources with the outside world" and "Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows. We cannot." (02:05:30-02:06:44). T'Challa starts to see the problem of his own privilege to a country that did not suffer the same things as many other African nations.

In an interview with *Black Panther* star Chadwick Boseman with The Verge, he says, "It's the enemy I've always known. It's power. It's having privilege." He characterizes T'Challa

as ‘born with a vibranium spoon in my mouth.’” (Liao, “Chadwick Boseman says T’Challa is the Enemy in Black Panther”). This view of T’Challa can be visible as he feels like he is held responsible for his father’s terrible actions when it came to leaving Erik behind. Overall, he hopes for a future where Wakanda and other nations can work together to building bridges as he mentions at the end of the film.

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse

Imposter syndrome is common within the Latino and African American communities as they are products of affirmative action laws. This started affecting the communities as they would see themselves as not being able to grasp the thought of them being success even when they are qualified. This is where Miles Morales fits in the conversation as he is a mix of both cultures; half Puerto Rican and half African American.

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse tells the story of the multiple Spider-Men in the vast universe of the Spider-verse. The main focus though is the origin of the Ultimate Universe Spider-Man which is the superhero known as Miles Morales. Miles is the first black Spider-Man that came into the comics in 2006 and was the first time a non Anglo-American character took the mantle of Spider-Man. A fact that tends to be overlooked is his biracial identity which serves as a metaphor for how he himself sees himself as Spider-Man.

The film follows the story of the Spider-man we have been used to through the many film adaptations, comics, and television shows. However, the film is about the life of Miles Morales who is another teenager who has been bitten by a radioactive spider to give him the abilities of

Spider-man. He struggles to get the hang of learning his superpowers and taking the mantle after the untimely death of his universe's Spider-man at the hands of Kingpin. As he tries learning the ropes of becoming the new Spider-man to protect New York he crosses paths with other Spider-men from different dimensions who act as his guide to learn what it takes to be Spider-man. Together they attempt to stop Kingpin from opening his particle accelerator to other dimensions and evidently ending the world.

The film starts by giving the whole history of the “one and only” Spider-Man who was Peter Parker in a fun animated live comic book coming to life. Peter is shown as the main focus of the film because of the way the film goes through pulling the audience to the original red and blue onesie wearing costume. Once we see who Miles is we see his domestic life as he gets ready to head to his new school for the gifted, Vision Academy. You hear him speak Spanish to his mother, which is his Puerto Rican identity, and speak English to his father who is the African-American identity. Then we see him interact with all his friends from the school he is now about to say goodbye which is special to him because of how he states they are “his people.”

Miles Morales/Ultimate Spider-man

Miles is caught in a loop of feeling like an imposter as he does not want to go to the new school. His first mention of the school is in the back of his father's cop car where he talks to his father, Officer Jefferson Davis, about how he does not feel like he has no choice with his life and leads to a screaming match where Jeff ends the conversation by shouting out, “You don't!”

(00:05:25-00:06:00). This scene is important as throughout the conversation he is in the back seat of Jeff's police vehicle as a prisoner rather than a partner who sits in the front seat next to Jeff. Miles's story is based on his entrapment in his life as he feels he is never in control and has no choice in anything except his failure.

The next heart to heart conversation between Miles and his father is towards the end after the Jeff has to deliver some tragic news in his dorm room. This conversation is done through a door that separates them which is a representation of their relationship as they never see eye to eye on Miles's life. This is where we learn the typical story between older minority generations and younger generations in terms about opportunities they didn't have growing up. In this case, Jeff wants his son to have a better future by attending Vision Academy, but Miles feels he does not belong there even though he has the intelligent skills that allowed him to attend the school.

Miles is prisoner in his own life as demonstrating in the first 10 minutes of the film. He is in the back seat of his father's car as a prisoner, his first day at the new school was overwhelming and he overall sneaks out to get a sense of who he truly is as a person. His first day is shown in a creative comic book montage of panel after panel as he minovers through the halls of Vision Academy to his classes. In these panels, he is seen being overwhelmed by the amount of assignments his classes have assigned for homework as well as his reactions to being amongst the intelligent crowd. As the montage goes on we are shown Miles slowly putting himself in the imposter seat as he is trying not to be the first one to answer questions and the last one to class. His teacher is the one who sees right through his actions as she hands him a scantron with a 0/100 to which Miles responds with, "a zero? A few more of those, you'd

probably have to kick me outta here, huh?" (00:08:15-00:08:45). He finishes his statement by saying, "Maybe I'm just not right for this school" (00:08:15-00:08:45).

The teacher then replies by mentioning that if a blindfolded person was to take a true or false exam he would get a fifty percent. She finishes her discussion with Miles by telling him, "You're trying to quit. And I'm not gonna let you" (00:08:15-00:08:45). And she ends by assigning him a personal essay which has to do with what kind of person he wants to be. This starts his sneaking off to figure out who he truly is as he makes his way to his Uncle Aaron's apartment. It is here that we see Miles's true habitat as he is comfortable in his Brooklyn area and has a strong bond with his Uncle who sees his true self.

By this point, Aaron takes him to "put up" his art on a blank slab of underground walls and the audience is introduced to the genetically altered spider that eventually give Miles's his spider abilities. We are given a fast forward scene as Miles and Aaron are creating the piece of art Miles sketched on his notebook. His uncle goes to tell him that he sees what he is doing in terms of figuring out who he wants to be as he wants to make his father proud, but doesn't know if he can be in a school like Vision Academy. After receiving a text, Aaron tells Miles it is time to go to which Miles quickly snaps a picture and the spider bites him. This begins the iconic transition period of his spider abilities coming to fruition as he goes back to school.

This is a hilarious part of the film as he tries to figure out what is going on to his body, but thinks he is going through puberty. The whole day goes from incident after incident as he accidentally gets his hand stuck in Gwen's hair to getting stuck to the walls and trying to continue sticking until he makes it into his room. Miles finds a Spider-man comic book and

begins to think, “There can’t be two Spider-Men” (00:18:10-00:18:30). The film quickly cuts to a second comic book being thrown on top of the first comic book which was the origin story we are given in the beginning of the movie.

By the time Miles goes to find answers he is back to the scene where the spider bit him and when he pokes it the spider glitches. This is where Miles gets in the middle of his Spider-man fighting the Green Goblin. Miles is saved and the two become in sync as their spider senses react to each other being Spider-men. His Peter tells him, “you’re like me,” and Miles terrifyingly replies with, “I don’t wanna be” (00:22:00-00:22:20). This is where his second identity suffers through imposter syndrome as even with his new found abilities he does not think of himself as Spider-man. He is not given much of a choice as his Spider-man dies after successfully stops the particle accelerator for the first time.

Like his father who yells at him about not having a choice in leaving Vision Academy, Miles has no choice in ignoring his powers and his responsibility in saving his family/Brooklyn. This is where Miles attempts to become like Spider-man instead of becoming his own Spider-man as he is different from the canon we have seen through three different film series. He is given the “goober” from his Peter before he died and is told to blow up the accelerator so that Kingpin can’t use it or else the world will end. The film follows Miles as he goes to buy a Spider-man costume from a costume shop, then reads through a few comic books on Spider-man as he studies how to become him, and finally attempts to have his own training exercise. This ends in a tragically funny scene where he trips on his shoelace and falls in comic book style with

the onomatopoeia used for his boinks and screams as he lands on the “goober”
(00:42:40-00:43:10).

He visits the grave of Peter Parker of his universe still in the Spider-man costume he purchased earlier. It is here where we explore more about his struggle to accept his powers and his bigger responsibility of becoming the next Spider-man. He speaks at loud, “I’m sorry, I’m not like you,” Miles is still trying to be like Peter rather than being his own version of Spider-man. He is still being trapped in his own life as he feels he has no control over his own life and must do what he is told rather than doing it his own way. An example is when the whole Spider People are introduced together at Peter’s secret lair in his Aunt May’s storage shed.

Spider-Gang: Animations

The Spider Verse is a vast universe where there are multiple Spider-men or Spider-women in their own respected dimensions. We learn about five different Spider-men from five different dimensions: Spider-man, Spider-woman, Spider-man Noir, Peni Parker, and Spider-ham. Each of these Spider-men have a similar origin story in the form of how they receive their abilities; bitten by a radioactive spider, lost a loved one close to them, and for a few year (years) have been the one and only Spider-man.

Peter B. Parker is the name of the Spider-man we as the audience are used to from the many live actions films, video games, and comics. In the film, he has been Spider-man for over 20 years which lead to his Uncle Ben dying like the Spider-man in the opening montage, marriage/divorce from Mary Jane, and his Aunt May dying. Gwen Stacy is Spider-woman who is

in a band who saved her father, but lost her best friend Peter Parker. Spider-man Noir is from the year 1933, a private eye who likes to fight Nazis, and lost his Uncle Benjamin. Peni Parker is from the year 3145 who lost her father, was bitten by a radioactive spider which she shares a psychic bond with and lives inside her father's robot. Spider-ham is a photographer from a world filled with cartoonish anamorphic humanoids who lost his own Uncle Ben.

Each of these characters have something that makes them different from the others whether it is an ability or trait which are also brought by their respected animations of their dimensions. Spider-ham is a cartoon character who's animation represents his special ability of the cartoon world; he can carry anything no matter size in his pocket and over exaggerates his movements for comic relief. This is demonstrated when he floats in the air when he smells a "delicious pie", tries to hide from Miles's roommate by running in place before zooming quickly, and when he uses big weapons like a giant magnet and hammer during the final battle.

Spider-man Noir has a black and white completion due to his dimension being in black and white. He is special for being the only Spider-man who uses guns along with his combat style as it is a dark universe where he can't trust anyone, but himself, due to the Noir genre archetype. While his animation pushes forward his black and white dimension, his world is better explained through euphemisms such as slang of the 1933 Depression Era and his inability to see color. While waiting for the "goober" to be created by Peni, he is seen laying on the couch trying to solve a Rubik's cube and can not figure out the colors as he asks for Spider-ham's assistance. He is quoted saying, "this is... Purple?" to which Spider-ham tells him he is wrong and later when the Spider Gang take control of the accelerator he states, "I'm taking this cube thing with

me. I don't understand it, but I will," (01:09:55-01:10:20, 01:33:55-01:34:08). During the final battle, Spider-man Noir is heard telling Tombstone, "Is that all you got? You gonna fight or you just bumping gums, you hard-boiled turtle slapper?" (01:30:34-01:30:42).

Peni Parker is a Japanese girl from the year 3145 that has an animation style that is represented that of the Anime style. Her introduction is typical Anime style format as she has a hyperbole of an entrance as she jumps up into a colorful transition until she poses next to Sp//der, her father's robot. She does this again she enters Sp//der during her first fight against Scorpion at Aunt May's house. Her facial expressions are common hyperboles of typical Anime faces as they have exaggerated eyes, mouths, and hair. This is seen when she shows high levels of happiness or anger as seen when she fights Scorpion on occasional times. Sp//der, itself, is decorated with Japanese stickers and its mainframe which Peni interacts with is all in Japanese to push furthermore the cultural background of Anime.

Gwen Stacy's animations are closely representative of Peter B. Parker's and Miles's because they are the ones who represent the norm. However, Gwen's costume is representative of her identity as a bisexual character. In her introduction, we are given her origin in a world that is drowned in shades of blue and pink from the buildings to the sky (00:55:00-00:56:00). The colors are even shown on her costume as under her hood and on her arms there are shades of pink with blue webbing.

The main trio of Gwen, Miles, and Peter each have similar animations as they are to represent the normal dimensions of reality. The small difference is Gwen's world is in blue and pink shades and the opposite shades of color in Peter and Miles' worlds. Since the universe the

film takes place is an opposite of Peter's universe in terms of certain things such as instead of NYPD it is PDNY. The other examples are the changes of color between the worlds such as the advertisement of Coca-Cola to Koca-Soda along with a darker shade of color. To the small change of Spider-man's hair color from a blond instead of the usual brunette we have seen through comics and films.

Through a White Narrative

These animations meet together as they are sharing the same space, dimension, and are constantly mingling with each other. However, this is Miles's world which is why the other Spider-men are constantly glitching as their atoms are trying to survive in a different dimension. Just like this is his story, the audience is given the stories about other characters who take the spotlight in an instant from their introduction. Once we learn who Gwen truly is she steals the show, as she saves their butts from Doc Ock. When the other characters are introduced, we learn each of their origins and get a bunch of character traits they have as they try to see if Miles has what it takes to be the next Spider-man.

Miles is constantly being in the background to all these experienced Spider-men and is feeling like an imposter in their presence. While he is excited to learn from Peter after witnessing his Spider-man die, but is put back in the sidekick position even though he does not want to be a sidekick. It's not until they infiltrate Alchemax and have a near death experience of escaping, Peter realizes that he wants to be Spider-man and has potential. Miles doesn't become his own person and he notices it when the other Spider-men are knocking him down to test if he has what it

takes to be a Spider-man. As they have a small conversation about him you can hear the phrases, “You need to be more honest with yourself about this,” and “He’s not ready. It’s obvious” (01:05:33-01:05:45).

Miles start to learn he is not ready to be Spider-man as he constantly being reminded he is not ready to take the mantle. He goes to get advice from his Uncle Aaron in which the audience learn about his true identity as The Prowler. After a quick chase, we fast forward to the Spider Gang at Aunt May’s house where Miles was followed leading to a big fight where everyone is fighting except Miles. Miles for the majority of the fight is standing frozen in fear as he is coming into realization about his biggest enemy; himself. The end of the fight ends with Miles and Prowler on the roof of the house as Miles takes off his mask to reveal to his Uncle Aaron he is the Spider-man he was ordered to kill. Aaron hesitates which gives Kingpin the opportunity to kill him and Miles.

This death was a piece of a puzzle that helps Miles through his transition into the hero he is destined to be. In a fit of rage he thrashes his room when Peter and the gang come to tell him about someone in their lives they have lost. Their respected loved ones who died were from their Uncle Ben (Peter, Noir, and Ham), their father (Peni), or their best friend (Gwen) which helped propel them into the hero gig (01:16:30-01:17:23). Peter tries to push him again one last time so Miles can prove he can make “Kingpin pay” when he ultimately fails Peter takes the goober from him and webs him into his chair. Miles asks for a final piece of advice, “When will I know I’ll be ready?” and Peter replies, “You don’t, it’s a leap of faith” (01:18:30-01:19:50).

Miles struggles to break free from the webbing when he father comes to the door to inform him about his Uncle Aaron as stated before behind a door. The conversation is about them drifting apart and how he was not trying to push Miles away, but to push him towards a better future. He overall ends the conversation ends by saying, “I see this spark in you. It’s amazing. It’s why I push you. But it's yours” and leaves (01:21:00-01:21:28). This gives Miles the spark he has been looking for as he breaks through the webbing by using his electric ability.

The next scene is a creative comic book coming to life scene where Miles goes back to Aunt May’s to get his own Spider-man suit and web shooters. He final learns he can not be Spider-man wearing the costume shop suit he bought as it is him trying to be Spider-man rather than becoming his own Spider-man. The suit he uses is his dimension’s Spider-man suit which he spray paints black and spray paints his own spider symbol on the chest. The audience can hear voice overs of Jeff and Peter’s advice to Miles about being the man he wants to become, in this case Spider-man. The voice over ends after the line, “leap of faith” and Miles jumps off in a stylistic scene as he swings through New York in perfect grace. At this point the spotlight is starting to follow Miles as he is finally becomes Spider-man and ends the scene with his comic falling on top of the other Spider-men origin comics.

In an article by Abraham Riesman, he states about how Miles’s history from being a Spider-man from a different universe until his rewritten history of being in the canon. He states, “When the Ultimate imprint ended in 2016, Miles was ported over to the conventional Marvel universe, where he’s played second fiddle to Peter but still held the spotlight in his own monthly adventures” (Riesman, “Is Miles Morales Finally Getting His Due As Spider-man?”). This is

reminiscent as throughout the film, Miles is seen more of a sidekick position rather than his own hero. It is not until the third act of the film where he fights alongside his other Spider People. Miles is Spider-man after losing someone close to him, after taking a leap of faith, and learning to get back up when he is knocked down.

The final scene is Miles taking control of his life and managing his imposter syndrome that has been controlling him through the film. The audience learns that Miles had finished his essay, put up an artwork in honor of his Uncle Aaron with his father, got hit by a drone, and finally met his roommate. The film becomes Miles's turn in the mantle of Spider-man, but as his own Spider-man rather than a replacement to Peter.

Black Heroes Matter

African American superheroes have been on the sidelines for many years behind the shadows of Anglo American superheroes. In the recent years, African American heroes have been put on the spotlight and have shown the ability to go toe to toe like their Anglo American counterparts. We have seen heroes being sidelined like Storm from X-Men, Falcon being a second hand guy to Captain America, or War Machine who relies on Tony to make his suit. Heroes like Black Panther have demonstrated on their first on screen performance to dominate the box office and even bring home an Oscar.

Black Panther had the highest-grossing film by a black director and a best domestic opening for a black star and cast. The film gave Marvel Studios its first ever Academy Awards as *Black Panther* won three awards. The historic awards are the Best Costume Design (Ruth Carter

was the first African American woman to win) and Best Production Design (Hannah Beachler was the first to be nominated for the category) (Watercutter, “*Black Panther’s* Oscar Wins Made History). *Spider-man: Into the Spider Verse* broke a few records itself as it was Sony’s highest grossing animation film in the month of December. Miles Morales’s first outing as he becomes Spider-man also won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.

These characters have given younger audiences to have a character they can relate to and allow them to feel represented in a predominantly dominated Anglo American world. *Black Panther* and *Spider Verse* have demonstrated having the capacity to tell compelling stories while also having characters audiences can relate with on an emotional level. These films have opened the door for more films that have African American superheroes as the lead. DC and Marvel studios have started greenlighting more films to include more characters of color such as Green Lantern Corps, sequels to *Black Panther* and *Spider Verse*, and Cyborg.

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