BLACKLASH

The Africana Collective

REPORT NO. 4

Is Blackness and Pan-Africanism Relevant in the Age of Chadwick Boseman?
INTRODUCTION

Chadwick Boseman transitioned on August 28, 2020. Members of the Collective met the next day to hash out internal and external feedback from the last townhall and to plan for the next. We all were convinced without much persuasion we should something honor Boseman life and work for both spoke to our guiding question, which we had planned to take up before he joined the ancestors. That guiding question, “Is Blackness and Pan-Africanism Relevant in the Age of Chadwick Boseman?” is not a light one. By “age” we mean the life and afterlife of Boseman, the characters he embodied with dignity, and as a stand in for all those ancestors who stand next us—and whom we stand shoulder-to-shoulder—in the fight of our collective lives for the African world. Join us in this moment of critical homage, in this critical fight.

Blacklash: The Africana Collective (BTAC) engages in interdisciplinary research to provide analysis and recommendations on a range of issues affecting the African(a) world—linked communities with peoples of African ancestry. Using our collective knowledge and skills, as well as our grounding as thinkers, educators, activists, organizers, and parents, our objective is to support and inform action toward safeguarded humane development throughout the African world. We are independent in our funding, research, and directives, allowing us to work decidedly in the best interests of said communities.

Each month, we consider one topical issue as a collective. In the process, we prepare individual statements, meet (virtually) to hammer out our findings, then prepare our report. That report is then shared with the African world via online outlets and through various networks a week prior to a (virtual) town hall meeting, where we invite members of the African world community to join us, debate, (dis)agree, and come away with perspectives that inform collective action. We strongly request that all attendees at the town hall read the report beforehand. This way, you are an active participant in shaping your own views and subsequent decisions. We encourage you to sign up, or register, for the town hall, so we may keep you abreast of upcoming events, key resources, and ways to translate the reports’ ideas into collective betterment scaled to wherever you are and with whom you have to work.

In this thought paper, report no. 4, we consider the topical issues surrounding debates about blackness and pan-Africanism. Join us for the virtual town hall, titled “Is Blackness and Pan-Africanism Relevant in the Age of Chadwick Boseman?” on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, at 6 pm EST/10 pm GMT.
The existence of an African global community must be based on cultural and spiritual deep structures. It is based on ancestry, kinship, and formative communities. Yes, Blackness is a social construct, a contract—but one with real-life meaning and consequences. Meaning-making is the heart of this identity group. That vital process is, what Amiri Baraka calls a “changing same.” Meaning-making refers us back to a “central body of cultural experience (Baraka, p.181).” To locate our African selves and our connections to one another, we must interrogate the “sameness” and perhaps, even some sort of common approach to change.

Much of the recent changes revolve around the development of this collective identity in the first place. Within the last 600 years or so, owing to massive social dislocation, physical displacement and the other ravages of slavery, religious imperialism and colonization, African people have begun to view themselves as a globally interconnected group, a racial group. On one hand, there are the aforementioned external forces which bind us together as a race, with theories of race such as the American concept of “hypodescent,” the “one-drop” rule examined by scholars such as Yaba Blay. On the other hand, are the internal forces, often described in—and problematized for being in—more abstract/metaphysical terms, like the “unique gifts” of the race, to which Carter G. Woodson recommended we shift our focus.

In any case, the present 21st century moment has been characterized by a struggle over whether the world is ready to leave these broad and contested racial categories behind. Would the abandonment of an African/pan-African/Black identity bring all peoples of the world closer to unification? Do people of African descent really still need to think and act collectively in order to make meaningful progress? Has a global Black identity ever truly been accepted/realized? Chadwick Boseman believed they did/do. He devoted his life—his personal and professional choices—to the maintenance of Blackness, the invocation of pan-African identity. The plays he wrote, directed and acted in, the film roles he chose, the endorsements he signed on to (and those he refused), were all a part of a Black legacy, which he carefully curated. He studied history and culture. More specifically, he studied African traditions of meaning making through the dramatic arts. He embodied ancestors as much as possible in these roles. He built communities, both intentionally and unintentionally. His work exemplifies the “Black fantastic,” Richard Iton outlines in his book. Boseman is not post-Black. Ultimately, the goal might still be to reach/return to a time in which a Black artist, the Black university, and a Black scholar need not exist as such. That time is not yet upon us. Not simply because racism and neocolonialism still exist, but also because we have yet to fully examine what we might be losing if we leave intentional Blackness behind. There is strong medicine, hundreds of years in the making, in Black cultures. It was a balm for the world before the madness of modernity, and it has become emergency medicine since then.

The tragic deception of Jessica Krug highlights the nature of what might be lost, and why Blackness and pan-Africanism is still relevant. At some point, this white woman who posed as a Black woman decided that being a white scholar studying Africa and teaching African history would likely garner a successful career and a myriad of privileges, but she wanted more. Taking advantage of the “one drop rule,” Krug decided to create a life in the heart of the culture, to be a creator and wielder of the medicine, not just an outside observer. The thing about
African cultures is that they are human-to-human/relationship focused. They are artisanal. The story of the human(s) who created a thing matters as much as the thing. The African humanity gives the thing its deep value and the human to human transmission gives the thing its meaning. An herb can be collected and processed into a pharmaceutical drug, but the resulting drug is but a fragment. African culture is about the time and place from which the herb was collected, the person administering the herb, that person’s depth of knowledge about/relationship to that herb in the context of a culturally-grounded herbalist tradition, how that person is connected with the patient, and so on. This is the approach to culture—even a dynamic and changing culture—which has helped African people survive and thrive, throughout hundreds of years of abject oppression across the world.

**PERSPECTIVE: DR. JARED BALL**

The passing of Chadwick Boseman has reminded me of the complex nature of assessing our situation and addressing questions of Blackness, Pan-Africanism, and Organization. That my own, and our collective’s, circles include those who knew him personally adds that much more. I did not know Boseman. I only know those several friends, colleagues, comrades who knew him well, during his time at Howard University and DC more broadly. Many of the public tributes, and the even extended conversations they generate, speak to the complexity of our condition. An individual public post telling of a personal experience and history with Boseman often has become wide-ranging commiseration, discussion, debate, and argument over who he was, what he represented, and even at times, a seeming inability to separate the man, often described in that original post, and the characters, often T’Challa, that Boseman would play on screen.

Specific to this discussion, or my own interpretation of this month’s BTAC gathering, has led me to question *what issues are illuminated in the aftermath of Boseman’s life, work, and death, as they relate to a question of the usefulness of Blackness and Pan-Africanism to political organization?* And, again, my initial thought is of the complexity of the issue.

Below is a model I developed initially for my dissertation but from which I have basically been operating ever since. Its purpose was/is to give some visual representation of the relationship between colonialism and the ideological function or purpose of mass media in a colonial setting. First, the model centers the coloniality of the Black/African people here (and abroad) while trying to summarize the ideological function of a media environment within which that colony becomes, what another simultaneous project on the late media theorist Marshall McLuhan has me considering, the “fish” who “did not discover water... [because]... an all-pervasive environment is always beyond perception.” What then are we to make of celebrity generated by this process?

We know from the work of Frances Stonor Saunders that celebrity in all manner of culture and art was fostered to promote American capitalism here and abroad and with a particular role for “Negroes” in cinema meant to promote to the “Third World” that its salvation was in the West. We know from the work of William Maxwell that from the Harlem Renaissance forward the FBI was “ghostreading” Black publications with a grievous concern
that Black art would move Black people toward radicalism. And while We see now circulating that moving Howard University speech given by Boseman as his own posthumous tribute we can be reminded of the work of William Corson who detailed a 1960/70s program of government infiltration of HBCUs, Howard University in particular, to measure (and blunt) the potential for Black radicalism to take hold there and spread among students. All of this gives new and deeper meaning to Shakespeare’s “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts…” What part are any of us playing at any given moment as we swim in our fishbowl?

From there, Marx argued that the primary function or “original sin” of capitalism is “commodity formation,” the reduction of all and anything, of all of us, to that which can be bought, sold, or traded and that this was equal in importance in the role of “mental” as well as material “production.” When Boseman becomes Disney media product, commodified, and yet in so doing also inspires Africans throughout an African world or diaspora does Pan-Africanism have meaning? New meaning? Disney will make billions off a now gone but still-commodified product who, as is often said, will be “worth more now dead than alive” to the media companies who own him forever. But do they? Every post of every person who seems to have ever met the man say he was more than the best image of him we have and that Boseman was the consummate artist. But that man is not the exported product. I’ve seen nearly every film Boseman has made and cannot remember one that does not in some way attempt to demonstrate the best of Africanity (even if I personally hated the film). But I also believe in the Vernon Philosophy of Black Media Avoidance and that we should never look for ourselves in colonial commercial product.

And here is where I turn to Greg Tate and his recognition of Africans as the “original commodity fetish” of the U.S. and noting the central role African performance (never mind labor) in both the accumulation of wealth through a popular cultural industry; but in also producing for Whites the necessary antithesis required for creating White superiority. To this I would add the essential role the production of African/Black “radicalism” plays in maintaining acceptable ranges of what response to oppression can be. Think of the institutionalizing via media of the openly expressed desires of the Bill Clintons who run (media) empires that they get John Lewis and not “Stokely Carmichael.” John Downing and Charles Husband isolated the necessity of producing our opposite to justify our own self-concept, that White must produce anti-Black imagery because their need toward White supremacist self-delusion is the U.S.’ “conceptual original-sin.” How then could they mass produce Kwame Ture? And yet a mass-produced Boseman seems to speak loudly toward a positive view of Blackness. So much so that “Black Twitter” has even taken to defend against the slightest online market concern about Black Panther 2 and that Howard University lecture is being wildly redistributed as an honorific to perfect Blackness. But when last have we heard genuine Black radicalism spoken at any major university convocation? And yet, again still, propaganda, however, can only intend, it cannot guarantee.

Finally, Marimba Ani and Amos Wilson, among many others, argue that the destruction of the very African consciousness required for Pan-Africanism as a “political necessity” of European imperialism and U.S. settler colonialism. This would either mean Boseman’s mass production, particularly as Black Panther, would have to either have been a huge mistake of empire, its hubris perhaps, or the finest bit of psychological warfare state craft. We have to see the intent but regarding impact; either we accept that any popular (and wildly relatively) positive depiction of Africa/Africans, even fake ones, is an advance, or we recognize the cinematic assassination
of radical pan-Africanism (Killmonger) and the outright assault on the symbolism and politics of Patrice Lumumba whose own speech to the colonial world is recast in its full antithesis by *Black Panther* as support for the CIA and a transfer of African resources to the West.

It does feel like the model is at play, especially now with Boseman gone. That is, we are all attempting to adapt what is initially his colonially-imposed projection onto our own and perhaps missing those differences, or seeing them as merely the opposing poles of “hate,” or “blind love.” When Boseman played Thurgood Marshall, James Brown, Jackie Robinson, or Vontae Mack he inspired (even if not particularly radically) a prideful Black/African-American Blackness not often seen and without controversy. As continental Africans, Jacob King (*Message From The King*), a South African and, of course, T’challa, the same would have to be said, minus any point about controversy. *Black Panther* remains among the most referenced and debated films of modern history and continues post Boseman’s passing. But whichever “side” of these debates or positions taken what is clear is that the concepts of Blackness and Pan-Africanism have been given both cultural boosts and political blows.

If Black Americans playing continental Africans and continental Africans playing Black Americans is truly causing as much controversy as online discussions suggest then these concepts will be hard pressed to be organizing tools and suggest we are heading backwards towards “lesser nationalisms” before a return to more radical formations would be possible. I remember Karl Deutsch describing long ago how Western powers were developing “supranational” methods of mass communication specifically to make those emerging newly “independent” nationalisms meaningless. If, as I would argue is the case with Boseman’s most popular film roles, Blackness and Africanity are praised along the historically conservative lines of “American exceptionalism” and presentations of the West as marching ever forward toward justice then as commodity Boseman loses political value and is simultaneously separated more from us and his own apparent actual self. Didn’t I read that he privately struggled, if not flat out hated, being asked to constantly flash the very empty sign of Wakanda?

Specific to my own position in this, one I do feel compelled to somewhat engage, are what appear to be shifting sands regarding where I am in all of this. Historically, even “mixed,” I was browner, with a full head of hair, and if anything, given the moment of the 1970s and 80s, I was asked more often to provide evidence of my mother’s Whiteness, whereas today I am more asked to provide evidence of my father’s Blackness. Avoiding, for now, any further nuance, essentially, I did not experience the “multiracial” America growing up despite being raised alone by my mother. I was Black with a White mother. But today, my own children ask me how I can claim Blackness while looking White and having lost my hair and melanin so do many others. Some of this is my own fading so to speak, but most of it relates to politics and place. Leaving for now, again, the nuance of my only being able to claim Blackness within the geopolitical “place” of the U.S. and literally nowhere else, it is also often the case that even here one can be Black as mixed only if maintaining mainstream Black political positions. Then there is also, as I’ve learned through the work and interviews with Critical Mixed Race Studies scholars like Ralina Joseph and Jared Sexton, the 1990s re-categorization of one-droppers like myself by White mothers demanding “bi/multiracial” categories so as to not fully lose racial identification of their children to Black fathers by full-on one-drop Blackness. In other words, I am now again the fish in a new bowl of water not knowing at all that my context has changed. And as such, or to that extent, I personally lose (all?) value as an effective advocate of (radical) Blackness or Pan-Africanism as in many ways I have been redefined out of my own former social and political categorization. This may also explain research published around 2011 which showed the “new passing”
in African America to be not of those hiding as White but as those masking as entirely Black. My first few decades I saw myself in the conversation around Black Nationalism as Malcolm X, today I am the Algerian ambassador to whom Malcolm once spoke asking where I stand in today’s “Black nationalism” looking, “... to all appearances, [as] was a white man... if [the objective defined is] the victory of Black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary.”

Now, while I do not feel alienated by Black Nationalism I am reminded in this now post-Boseman moment, and the response to his passing, that many Black Nationalisms are at minimum raising new questions about complexion, parentage, and “authenticity,” perhaps rightly so, but within what is also a post-COINTELPRO environment which has made overt expressions of radical Black nationalism and pan-Africanism nearly extinct or, at best, filtered through highly antagonistic, popular culture, celebrity-driven propaganda. Obama, Drake and Patrick Mahomes can be accepted in their Blackness but Colin Kaepernick is challenged in his only, paradoxically, for taking what are seen as radical Black political positions and, thereby, overstepping lines being newly (re)drawn.

What I can only conclude is that however we project onto Boseman our preferences that we recognize those as doorways into, or out into, new spaces teeming with radical potential if those doorways are first interrogated and then discarded. Boseman in life seems to have wanted to embrace the best in what commercial forms of pan-Africanist symbolism would allow. But, especially now in his absence, we all will have to aggressively work to give material meaning and organization to Blackness and pan-Africanism.

PERSPECTIVE: DR. KWSASI KONADU

I moved from Brooklyn to the District of Columbia (DC) in June 2000 for graduate studies at Howard University. Chadwick Boseman graduated from Howard a month before I arrived, and we would never meet. But I encountered him through his movies, which is to say the way he worked the silver screen to place notions of blackness and pan-Africanism, or pan-African blackness, for us to seriously engage their implications: is blackness and pan-Africanism relevant in the age of Chadwick Boseman? By “age,” I mean the chronological life of Boseman and the afterlife of he and the characters he imagined for global Africa. Chadwick’s life work, echoing W. E. B. Du Bois, seized upon the idea that “all art is propaganda”—a tool Du Bois considered part of the arsenal for “racial uplift” across the pan-African world.

In a symposium Du Bois organized through the Crisis magazine in 1926, he asked, “Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written?” To these, we can readily add film and TV, or simply media. Du Bois’s question were part a speech honoring fellow historian of the African diaspora—decades before the phrase was used or popularized—Carter G. Woodson. I cannot prove it, but I am confident Boseman, like myself, read Du Bois and Woodson. We all also
share Howard in common—Du Bois lectured and Woodson taught there, and Boseman and I spent our undergraduate and (part of my) graduate years there respectively. And because Howard was and is a space of blackness and pan-African spectacle, what better way to think about our guiding question than through Woodson and Du Bois?

Is blackness and pan-Africanism relevant in the age of Chadwick Boseman? My view is that blackness as category of belonging and identification, and even around which one organizes, should be abolished. In its place should stand the answer to a simple question: does one stand with the direct descendants of the people who chose to leave Africa in antiquity—populating Eurasia and rest, becoming culturally different peoples—or those who chose to remain in the region dubbed Africa? The operative word here is “choice.” For centuries, our brightest scholars and thinkers have debated this very question, drawn ideological lines in the sand, pushed their positions, but none framed this matter as choice. Once a choice is made, then most or all would know who will fight for what. Under the rubric of blackness, this prerequisite is stillborn. Naming and from whom it comes from matters. Without an internal sense of who/what kind of people we ought to be, impossible will be the task of organizing targeted political and social action—call it pan-Africanism reimagined—across wide geographies and even more treacherous socio-political hierarchies of race, gender, class, (dis)ability, etc. Metaphorically, we cannot simply pluck weeds choking the life out of nutritious plants; the entire field must be burned to prepare the lands for planting anew. These “prescribed burns” improve the health of the field.

We live in plantation societies, domiciled on different estates. Under the banner of blackness, we protest, march, picket, boycott, unionize, form cooperatives, build impermanent institutions, vote, pay taxes, join the armed forces, serve in levels of government, and more. We do so with the hope provided by blackness—the hope that individual, then perhaps some collective condition will improve by an invitation to their party. And yet the empirical evidence of our lived experiences in doing these and more to survive amounts to plucking weeds here and there. We know the weeds will return, will be more resilient, will not rest when we are tired. One of those colossal weeds is cultural identification—what kind of human beings are we? Blackness, being black or its synonym negro, describes a thing. It is an adjective, not a noun. Tucked away in the appendix to Carter G. Woodson’s *The Mis-Education of the Negro* is a short piece entitled “Much Ado about a Name.” In it, Woodson engages in a sidebar conversation about “what the race should be called. Africans, Negroes, colored people, or what?” Bear in mind, he is writing in the early 1930s. Woodson is unconvinced a name will “solve the race problem.” “It does not matter so much what the thing is called,” Woodson continued, “as what the thing is.” If there was any doubt about Woodson’s argument and his preference he wrote, “The word Negro or Black is used in referring to this particular element because most persons of native African descent approach this color. The term does not imply that every Negro is black; and the white does not mean that every white man is actually white. Negroes may be colored, but many Caucasians are scientifically classified as colored. We are not all Africans, moreover, because many of us were not born in Africa; and we are not all Afro-Americans, because few of us are natives of Africa transplanted to America.”

For Woodson, “There is nothing to be gained by running away from the name” Negro. S/he must learn to accept it, as the peoples of African ancestry he met in London and Paris had done with apparent pride. And then s/he must “struggle and make something of himself and contribute to modern culture, [so] the world will learn to look upon him as an American.” Woodson was wrong. Ancestors do not die—that is, the spirit or force animating
bones, brain, and blood plasma—and so one could be born anywhere with “African” ancestors, along with millennia of archived knowledge, conditioned genetics, and the burden of a composite, yet countless cast of ancestry determining more than skin complexion. And for those who cherish their white or other ancestry, this is not a debate (where one must choose sides). It is an IQ test. If spiritual force or energy cannot be destroyed/dead, only remade, then this too is a choice between relatively small sample size of “white” genetic input and thousands of “African” ancestral forces, especially for descendants of those who chose to remain in Africa. To settle for black/negro is a lazy shorthand for finding comfort amongst the weeds, while testifying one is an American too—whatever “an American” is supposed to mean. Colored or Afro-American/African-American leads to the same dead-end. What about African? Though not rooted in skin complexion or color, it comes from the same womb as black, negro, and the like. At best, “African” might serve as a bridge, a transition point, between now and the choice to be made. And the proposition in front of us is less an actual name, though that matters, but that unlike these disqualifed candidates, what is at stake is that a name, a choice, emerge from the people for which those monikers were crafted.

Woodson transitioned in 1950—and recently I had a dream with this ancestor, standing in a kitchen talking—and so he would not have experienced the unending of the term negro, during the Black Power era. Whatever we remember or think of that era, undeniable was its reminder we have, since those monikers were hoisted upon us, pushed back against them in search for self-(re)definition, a peoplehood beyond the literature and laws of host societies that render us dammed. And yet, during that era, what did organizing around blackness or even in multiracial coalitions substantially give us? Jailed, assassinated, exiled, or the like, alliances evaporated, self-interest paralleled the drug and gang regimes while those who were never really invested in Black Power politics survived as best they could under the rubric of being black and occasionally African American. In the post-WWII era, what appeared, then, was what I call the curse of the first—blacks/negroes considered “first” achievers in white-authored societies. A common qualification is that these were individuals and that were or remained non-threatening to the established order. These individuals were weaponized, used as foils to not address systemic tyranny and violence in housing, health care, schooling, etc., by propagating them as evidence society is just, that it works, and that those who suffer could achieve the same if they work hard and along the same non-threatening lines—there is a potential place for them at the country club. Though this is not what James Baldwin meant when he wrote, “The story of the Negro in America is the story of America,” the category of the black/negro, “the Negro painted by white Americans,” remains the indispensable scaffold that holds U.S. society together. Without the black/negro, it collapses.

Boseman’s first movie, The Express, featured him playing the first black person to win the Heisman Trophy, a role updated in Draft Day, then followed by another first, Jackie Robinson, in 42. Not long after we got Marshall, yet another first. Though he played these firsts, further weaponizing their reach and authorized value, his embodiment, his interpretation of their lives gave them something they ought not have without white consent: dignity. It is easy to forget Jackie Robinson helped build low-income housing and co-founded a bank in Harlem or that his pan-African-minded son David Robinson moved to Tanzania decades ago and works with over 300 coffee farmers in a cooperative. Boseman’s interpretation of Thurgood Marshall, who lived in Harlem, focused on his life and personhood before his joined the Supreme Court and the cast of “firsts blacks.’ This embodiment with dignity was evident in 21 Bridges, where Boseman’s character became a police officer to honor his slain
father, or *Get On Up*, where he channeled James Brown’s cultural import or the soul and funk of black folk, or *Message from the King*, an action thriller premised on kinship—finding his estranged younger sister. But most significant of the firsts was Boseman as T’Challa in *Black Panther*, because if we put the “first major black superhero movie” aside, Boseman and cast were pan-African blackness amplified.

We can rightly or wrongly debate the propaganda streamed through his movies, how the cloud of the “first” black/negro hovers over all, but Boseman stood in the aura of Paul Robeson: “The artist must take sides,” Robeson said, “He must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice.” Boseman made his choices, consistently, about which roles he would play and how. We also have a choice to make. I hope we chose to abolish blackness, the *black/negro*. In doing so, we clear the fields for a reimagined pan-African synchronization and action. Pan-Africanism is less an intellectual or whatever movement, or even a series of international meetings, than it is a political strategy of coordinated action. Whether we are working with real or fictive or transitory bonds of solidarity—to get us over the hump of atomization—that strategy hinges on a shared, working definition of the whom that action is to be coordinated. At stake is addressing the collective who(m), before the what and how. Until then, we will continue to live out the fictions we call lives, on estates, and as “the Negro painted by white Americans.”

**PERSPECTIVE: DR. MJIBA FREHIWOT**

*I am not African because I was born in Africa but because Africa was born in me.*

—Kwame Nkrumah

What is Blackness? Is Pan-Africanism a movement or an ideology? These are questions that have been discussed and debated intensively in the academic and activist communities repeatedly. Is there any new information or thoughts that one can share on this topic? The answer is both complicated and simple in that this is both a collective and individual decision based on historical and contemporary moments. Blackness and Pan-Africanism are in essence and form a political manifestation that extend beyond space and time. Blackness is not necessarily a cultural manifestation but can be viewed as an aspect of culture. Sekou Toure in *Revolution, Culture and Pan-Africanism* (1978), reminds us that culture is the total sum of a people including their resistance against oppression. It is in this resistance that Blackness finds a home…this resistance is against slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism and everything in between. Blackness is a powerful response to both individual and collective oppression.

Pan-Africanism on the other hand is not necessarily only a response to oppression. Although, it emerged in a period of history when African (both on the Diaspora and Continent) were in the throes of colonialism, racism, and other forms of exploitation. Kwame Ture (1996) suggests that Pan-Africanism is but a manifestation of the natural evolution of African people. He suggests that if in fact this evolution had not been interrupted Pan-
Africanism would have organically grown in Africa. Pan-Africanism as a movement is political, economic, cultural, and social and one that is both concrete and metaphysical at times (depending on those who are engaging with Pan-African thought and action).

In the light of the success of Chadwick Boseman and other Black/African actors and actresses the question that one is asking is if Pan-Africanism and Blackness is relevant today? For this author it is very much relevant when you consider that these individuals represent a small percentage of the struggling masses. When you consider that Africa is still saddled with IMF/World Bank loans and raw resources are being extracted at little to no benefit to Africa or African people. Blackness as a political designation one that can be used to organize around is extremely important when we realize that African/Black and Indigenous people in Latin America are fighting a battle for recognition, political and economic equality and to viewed as human beings. The fundamental question we must ask is if one country or one segment of the African world can challenge a global system that is oppressing African people and all of humanity?

PERSPECTIVE: DR. TODD STEVEN BURROUGHS

“Show him who you are”

—Queen Ramonda, to T’Challa, in Black Panther
The sum total of Chadwick Boseman, like his films, is red, white and blue—an American product, many now-digital reels filled with noble figures played by him, struggles overcome, and happy endings. *Black Panther* is a Disney product, the ultimate in Americana. But what does it mean when the math is applied that it took one African woman to bore him in Anderson, South Carolina in reality and three African women to rebirth him in Wakanda on-screen?

Chikafa-Chipiro writes:

*In the film, Ramonda, Shuri and Nakia are at the centre of T’Challa’s re-birth. Ramonda as the [Q]ueen [M]other implores the ancestors on behalf of T’Challa. M’Baku has preserved T’Challa between life and death by keeping him buried in the snow and it is the heart-shaped herb that Nakia saves from death at Killmonger’s hand that will revive T’Challa. Therefore, the three women preside over T’Challa’s death and re-birth ritual as they chant to the ancestors and whisper ‘wake up T’Challa’. This is a scene that has been replayed a few times before in the film at the challenge for the throne ceremonies and at T’Challa’s and Killmonger’s respective anointings as Kings of Wakanda. The women, although not at the centre of the masculinist combat for the throne, are at the helm of the rituals and ceremonies in the presence of the men. Suffice to also point out that Ramonda, Shuri and Nakia negotiate peace with M’Baku’s Jabari tribe, the fifth Wakandan tribe that had chosen to isolate itself in the mountains and are thereby able to save Wakanda in tribal unity.*

There is a maxim that there are only seven basic plots: Rags to Riches, Overcoming the Monster, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, Rebirth. But I take the argument that the Black female New York City high schoolteacher said at the end of Andrew Garfield’s 2014 film *The Amazing Spider-Man*: That there is, in reality, only one plot—one question asked by her and by the young Black male Oaklander to King T’Challa at the end of *Black Panther*: Who am I/are you?

Those who argue the irrelevancy and error of Pan-Africanism have a very simple answer. Black American. Black Briton. Jamaican. Brazilian. To them, the fantasy of *Black Panther* is mirrored in the real-life farce of the African Union—a group whose headquarters was built by, and subsequently spied on by, the Chinese. So the African Union’s announced attempt to build a Wakanda could be both laughable and appropriate from that perspective. *Black Panther*, then, from an ADOS or otherly-critical point of view, is just a Pavlovian response, a Christmas-morning yearn of the childish fantasy of Black Americans having a Metropolis of their own. From that perspective, it’s no wonder that Killmonger’s dreams are dashed and his life allegedly taken at the end of that loving glimpse into the unrequited African world.

But equally so, Boseman’s hero career is a subconscious need for the return of Gilgamesh—a manifestation of the need for the heroic man (or, in the case of *Black Panther*, heroic women). *How can the collective unconscious, then, not be relevant?* There may be a way to counter that claim, if the unconscious is hijacked. Salim Washington examines the encoding/decoding of the Africana audience of the film, saying that “the interaction and reception of the film, however, by black people around the world adds to the meaning and fact of this film and has elevated the screenings to a cultural event.” Did/do the collective unconscious in a
worldwide market-culture trade the search for spiritual inner meaning through parable for an external event, a popular-culture happening? This is perhaps the new question. Let the perfect propaganda of 21st century Disney technology kick in, and the answer is a simple yes, its hegemony absorbing any leftover space in our brains.

But our now-ancestral subject points in a direction made while among the living. Boseman chose realistic heroic roles that allowed him to search through the 20th century American personality—a singer, an athlete, a lawyer—but his career and life’s climax, the role he will forever be linked to, is the fantasy African one, the yearning for something more. Can the hope of the slave be so easily dismissed because of the venue and medium? One hopes not.

African-Americans continuously hover between life and death, buried in the icy snow of the West. Boseman now does not. Whether he is now with an African Judeo-Christian God or whether he is cradled in the arms of Bast is known by no one currently on Earth. But Boseman kept telling us who he was by his work, by his works, by his base. The relevancy of Blackness and Pan-Africanism will be determined by deciding whether we will believe in Boseman, not T’Challa; whether we will listen to the always bigger-than-life African women who are always either calling the question or trying to give out the answer, prodding us to live our actual names, to re-awaken us; whether we take him and her seriously, at their words.
TOWN HALL AND RESOURCES

Town Hall
September 9, 2020 at 6 pm: https://www.crowdcast.io/blacklashcollective

Resources
Books and Articles


Yaba Blay, (1)ne Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race. BLACKprint Press, 2013.


Web


Corson, W., *Promise or peril; the black college student in America*, 1970 [https://archive.org/details/promiseorperilbl00cors/page/n7/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/promiseorperilbl00cors/page/n7/mode/2up)


(FREE!) for a more complete discussion of the colonial media model [https://imixwhatilike.org/2011/07/01/i-mix-what-i-like-a-mixtape-manifesto/](https://imixwhatilike.org/2011/07/01/i-mix-what-i-like-a-mixtape-manifesto/)

For more on “The Vernon Philosophy of Black Media Avoidance” [https://imixwhatilike.org/tag/the-vernon-philosophy-of-black-media-avoidance/](https://imixwhatilike.org/tag/the-vernon-philosophy-of-black-media-avoidance/)


Films

*I Am Not Your Negro* (2016)
Ideological Basis of Mass Media

- **Marx**: Commodity as the Original Sin of Capitalism
- **Tate**: African People as the Original Commodity of the US
- **Downing/Husband**: Racism as the Conceptual Original Sin of the US
- **Ani/Wilson**: Destroying Afrikan culture is a political necessity

Education & Journalism
 Establishment of Conceptual Boundaries

Managed Outcomes
 Politics of Popularity and Fame

Cultural Industry
 Big 3
 UMG, WMG, EMI
 Own and distribute 95% of music in the Western world

Intellectual Property and Copyright
 UMG
 2 Million + Songs

Radio
 Consolidated Ownership
 Radio One
 Clear Channel

Top 40 Play Lists
 Payola
 Promotions/Omission