Welcome Week 2018
Micro-Seminars

Constructing the Self: Identity, Responsibility and Double Consciousness in Marvel’s Black Panther

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The film Black Panther highlights an isolated Black nation which thrives as a wealthy and technologically advanced society by preserving their traditional government and cultural practices. Without influence and involvement from the rest of the world, Wakanda becomes a sacred and safe space for its citizens and consequently symbolizes a safe space for Black American viewers. The concept of a “safe space” generally refers to a space where marginalized people from a particular group come together to discuss issues that are important to them, without fear and without the need to self-police and monitor their behaviors (Merriam Webster dictionary).

In W.E.B. Du Bois’ groundbreaking seminal work, The Souls of Black Folk, he coined the term “double consciousness”, defining it as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1953). Through generational abandonment, the character Erik “Killmonger” Stevens experiences this “twoness” - that of an American and a Wakandan. He plays the radical, advocating for the rights of his people, but struggles to find a safe space, never really belonging to either community.

This feeling of double consciousness reveals itself in many settings, particularly where marginalized groups struggle to define themselves and exist in a world that “others” them. This micro-seminar intends to draw parallels between the fictional African nation Wakanda, from Marvel’s Black Panther, and W.E.B Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. Focusing on clips from the film Black Panther, short pre-assigned readings and a written assignment, we will unpack how we negotiate and navigate double consciousness in constructing personal identities.