

## **“Go Back to Africa”: Afrocentrism, the 2016 NFL Protests, and Ryan Coogler’s 2018 *Black Panther***

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### **Abstract:**

The concept of an imagined homogenizing shared cultural heritage worked to further the 19th Century “back to Africa” movement, which urged members of the African American diaspora to return to ancestral homelands in Africa (to which, because of their ancestral forced removal during slavery, they had no access), even as that narrative flattened conceptions of African identity to a mythical ideal. Further, the production of mythic fictional Africas – whether negative, as those recently constructed by Donald Trump’s assertion that African nations are “shithole” countries, or positive, as posited in Stan Lee’s graphic novel *Black Panther* in 1966, at the height of the Civil Rights movement and reimagined by Ta-Nehisi Coates in the age of Trump – have worked to revisit and interrogate the way that citizens of the United States both imagine and often uncritically investigate our mediated understanding of Africa as inaccessible, mythical utopian homeland of the past and an enigmatic and often negatively connotated “third-world” of the present. In this essay, I discuss how the “back to Africa” mandate as manifest in the current political moment – as either an admonishment by racist white people (as against NFL players who protest) or embraced by African Americans as a strategy for reconnection with an ancestral homeland (as in *Black Panther*) – depends upon the acceptance of a bifurcated identity that negates the liminal space of hyphenated “African-American” identity.

**Keywords:** Afrocentrism, NFL, *Black Panther*, Trump