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# American Cinematographer



Kramer Morgenthau, ASC  
and Director Julius Onah Partner on  
***Captain America: Brave New World***

### Kramer Morgenthau, ASC and Julius Onah Join Forces on *Captain America: Brave New World*



A new champion has taken on the Captain America mantle, and director Julius Onah and cinematographer Kramer Morgenthau, ASC were tasked with framing this first foray of Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) as the star-spangled Avenger for the Marvel feature *Captain America: Brave New World*. “I needed a cinematographer who understood the nuances of composition and color, but who also had the experience to handle a movie of this scale,” Onah says. “It’s a short list! I’d seen Kramer’s work in *Fahrenheit 451* [AC June ’18],

and I immediately thought, ‘Here’s someone who gets it.’”

Adds Morgenthau, “I think Julius was chosen for this movie because of [his] fresh vision. He approached it with the goal of making it stand on its own as a paranoid thriller while honoring the legacy of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which now spans around 35 films. He brought in nontraditional compositional styles and referenced a wide range of films, which was incredibly exciting for me as a cinematographer.”

The film is set in the era after

Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) — who served as the red-white-and-blue-suited super-soldier in 11 features, from *Captain America: The First Avenger* (shot by Shelly Johnson, ASC; AC Aug. ’11) through *Avengers: Endgame* (shot by Trent Opaloch) — has grown too old to wield the shield, and Wilson now selflessly shoulders the burden. *Brave New World* sees the newly minted superhero saddled with saving the day when a mole who has infiltrated the inner circle of U.S. President Thaddeus Ross (Harrison Ford) brings the world to the brink of

all-out war.

AC connected with Onah (*Luce*, *The Cloverfield Paradox*) and Morgenthau (*Thor: The Dark World*, AC Dec. ’13; *Creed III*, AC March ’23) to discuss their collaboration.

**American Cinematographer:** Julius, what were your goals for the cinematography on this project, and what made Kramer a good fit?

**Julius Onah:** It was my first opportunity to work on something of this scale, and I’m fortunate Marvel was so supportive of

Opposite: Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) wields the shield as Captain America. This page: Director Julius Onah checks a setup with Kramer Morgenthau, ASC.

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PHOTO ON OPPOSITE PAGE BY JALEN MARLOWE. PHOTO ON THIS PAGE BY ELI ADE.



the look, feel and vibe I wanted. Paranoid thrillers like *The Day of the Jackal* were a starting point, as well as *Le Samourai* and *Point Blank*. I'd shot all my prior work on celluloid, so it was important to capture not just the vibe of those films, but also their texture and look. After [Kramer and I] had a few conversations and discussed [our ideas] with the studio, it was clear he was the perfect choice. And he delivered.

**Kramer Morgenthau, ASC:**

I was eager to work with Julius after seeing *Luce*, which I thought was an incredible piece of

filmmaking. He is very passionate about shooting on film, and though we would have loved to shoot *this* movie on film, we didn't. Given Marvel's production pipeline, digital made more sense. That said, we worked hard to make it look and feel like film. We conducted extensive color-science research and testing to emulate the qualities of celluloid. We used a LUT that closely matched Kodak's [Vision 500T] 5219. I got some invaluable advice from Steve Yedlin [ASC], who generously shared his deep knowledge of color science, which resulted

in a LUT nicknamed 'Yodak 5219.' Yedlin modified his existing LUT, which was personally and painstakingly built to suit our specific needs. We tested it extensively, adding our own grain, gate weave, halation and other artifacts to replicate the texture of film as closely as possible. The LUT was designed specifically for the Arri Alexa; it could theoretically work on other cameras, but it was optimized for the Alexa. The final colorist for the movie was [ASC associate member] Stephen Nakamura at Company 3. In prep, we worked with [ASC associate

member] Peter Doyle at Picture Shop to run the color science and perform other camera tests.

After testing, we decided to shoot with Panavision C Series anamorphic lenses, which gave us the character and quality of older lenses we were looking for. For the Imax sequences, we also used Panavision Ultra Panatar IIs, which have a 1.33x squeeze to fit Imax's 1.90:1 aspect ratio. We shot a certain number of the sequences in Imax. So, the final film in Imax will go back and forth between 1.90 and 2.39, while the regular theatrical versions will just





**This page:** The resourceful “Cap” fends off attackers with his indestructible shield. **Opposite:** Operators Brigman Foster-Owens (left, holding a Ronin 2 gimbal) and Steadicam operator Mike Heathcote capture Mackie in action.

be in 2.39. The 1.90 was reserved for some of the major action sequences. It’s breathtaking when the frame opens up for them on a giant Imax screen.

We also conducted extensive tests to ensure the lighting had

a sculpted, cinematic quality; we wanted to avoid the flat, ambient look that can sometimes creep into modern films. Julius wanted to hark back to the classic cinematography of earlier eras.

**What were some things that**

**came up in your early creative conversations?**

**Morgenthau:** Julius brought a lot of references to our discussions about the approach to this film. There were a few films we kept coming back to during prep, in addition to the ones he already mentioned. *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* [shot by Thimios Bakatakis, AC March ‘18] was one. *Trance* [shot by Anthony Dod Mantle,

ASC, BSC, DFF; AC May ‘13]. And there was another film ... what was it?

**Onah:** *The Great Beauty* [2013, shot by Luca Bigazzi].

**Morgenthau:** Julius loved the quality of the modeled light in that movie and often referred to it. We would reference frames from that film and others on set.

Beyond that, we discussed how Julius wanted to use the





camera, favoring a controlled, precise compositional style over handheld or gratuitous movement. He wanted to explore abstract framing, placing characters asymmetrically, while also using symmetry and centering when appropriate.

**Onah:** One thing partially inspired by *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* was giving characters lots of headroom. Since this movie is a paranoid thriller, I wanted to convey through composition the pressure weighing on these characters. During production, I often brought

reference stills on set from the movies we'd discussed, and we'd start each day looking at these images to figure out how to organically weave those ideas into the visual storytelling.

**Once you got into production, how did the days go?**

**Morgenthau:** Julius comes to set with a level of preparation that's rare. He always had references on set, matching compositions he envisioned to what was onscreen. He created detailed shot lists and used Shot Designer software to map out bird's-eye plans for



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PHOTO BY ELI ADÉ.

**This page and opposite: U.S. President Thaddeus “Thunderbolt” Ross (Harrison Ford) transforms into the Red Hulk, wreaking a level of havoc only Captain America can help control.**

camera placement and coverage. There was no guessing on set; he had a clear game plan, as well as a backup plan for when time was tight, which happens on every film no matter the scale. His preparation meant we could maximize efficiency without sacrificing quality.

**Onah:** Kramer’s whole team was so collaborative, even with my obsessive attention to symmetry. For example, if lights were built into a shot, we made sure

they were perfectly aligned to serve the story.

The cast adored the camera team, and Harrison Ford even told me it was one of the best camera crews he had ever worked with. He emphasized that for a performer to tell the story with their body, they need to trust the camera team to capture that movement. He described it as a dance, whether with the Steadicam operator [Mike Heathcote] or key grip [Joseph Dianda],

where they’re attuned to his performance. If he decided to move in a particular direction or speed, they responded immediately, capturing the essence of his actions with precision. He consistently praised how Kramer, Heathcote and the whole team stayed alert and adapted to his needs. That trust and sensitivity are vital for an actor.

What made it even more exciting was that Harrison is in *The Conversation* [shot by ASC members Bill Butler and Haskell Wexler] one of the original paranoid thrillers! It wasn’t a direct reference for us, but everyone

— from Kramer to [producers] Kevin Feige, Louis D’Esposito, Nate Moore and Kyana Davidson — was committed to ensuring that this film maintained a clear throughline to the classic movies that inspired it.

**Julius, is there a moment from the shoot that stands out in terms of your collaboration with Kramer?**

**Onah:** One of my favorite scenes was shot at a church in Atlanta. The stained-glass windows were so thick that during prep, we weren’t sure we’d be able to pump enough light through them to achieve the look



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## Picture Partners

Tech Specs: 2.39:1, 1.90:1 (Imax sequences)  
Camera | Arri Alexa LF  
Lenses | Panavision C Series, Ultra Panatar II, VA prime, Petzval prime, AWZ, ATZ, ALZ



**Above:** Joaquin Torres, aka Falcon (Danny Ramirez) meets with Wilson by the light of a vehicle's headlamps. **Below:** Cap spreads his wings. **Opposite:** Onah and Morgenthau on location.

I wanted. But Kramer and our gaffer, Josh Davis, not only figured it out, but did it beautifully. It's one of the first scenes in the movie and really set the tone for what we were trying to accomplish. This is a paranoid thriller, so the

audience has to believe what they're seeing to buy into the characters' journey. The story is about overcoming blind spots and learning to trust someone who might be on the opposite side of where you stand politically,

emotionally or psychologically. The photography was critical to conveying that, and nailing this scene was essential for everything that followed.

**Kramer, you've shot a few studio tentpoles now, and Julius, this was your first project of this scale. What are some of your observations about what you each brought to the process?**

**Morgenthau:** Julius wanted the film to feel grounded, real and plausible despite the fantastical elements. That meant creating a visual language that felt authentic to the characters' world. At the same time, we had to balance that realism with the larger-than-life nature of the Marvel franchise.

**Onah:** What Kramer is hinting at is something that became







a mantra during production: 'Deny red.' He leaned into it so much that it caught on, and eventually, Ramsay Avery, our production designer, gave me a hat with that phrase on it. The idea was to make the Red Hulk's appearance feel like an intrusion into the story. So, we systematically removed red from the film's palette, aside from small instances like a traffic light or the red on Cap's suit. This restriction forced us to collaborate in new ways. Kramer, Avery, our costume designer [Gersha Phillips] and set decorator [Rosemary Brandenburg] had to be in constant communication to ensure the absence of red across the board. When red did appear, it became a deliberate, powerful choice. There's a sequence at the midpoint of the movie where red starts to seep into the lighting, and the way Kramer designed it is stunning.

I love obstructions like that because they challenge creativity. As the saying goes, 'The absence of limitation is the death of art.' We also avoided handheld camerawork, which has been a hallmark of modern action films. Instead, we leaned into the visual language of paranoid thrillers; that gives the film a distinct energy and style, and I'm incredibly grateful to the entire team — including Kramer, the stunt coordinators, fight choreographers and designers — for making it work. They brought this vision to life without relying on the usual tools, and the result feels truly unique.

I'd never worked on anything at this scale before, and Kramer was someone I could lean on — even for subtle things, not just the big 'Marvel movie' moments. For example, there's a specific character scene where I was trying to nail the timing of a reveal. Kramer suggested, 'If you make these small adjustments, the reveal will hit even harder.' That's the value of having someone as experienced and sensitive as Kramer. It's not just about scale; it's about intimacy, specificity and authenticity. At the end of the day, no matter how much money you're spending or how fancy the tools and tech are, it's about capturing the life in front of the camera.

**Morgenthau:** Julius set the bar very high and constantly pushed me to stretch the conventions of what a superhero thriller could be, and to elevate every aspect of the cinematography. He doesn't take the easy route; he takes the route that speaks to his vision and the narrative drive he's going for. That's inspiring.

**Onah:** I have to thank Kramer for his willingness to go there. On a movie like this, it's easy to fall back on conventions or rely on what's worked in the past. It takes real determination and talent to step outside of those boxes. I'm so grateful for the collaboration. I can't wait for people to see Kramer's work in this film. It's truly exceptional.

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